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‘Secret Towns’: British Intelligence in Asia during the
Cold War

Nikita Shah

A thesis submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the
degree of Doctor of Philosophy in Politics and International Studies

Submitted March 2016

Department of Politics and International Studies

University of Warwick

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¹ Adapted from Iggy Azalea and Charlie XCX, 'Fancy'. Available at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=O-zpOMYRi0w>. Last accessed, 3rd March 2016.

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Thank you all.

Declaration

I declare that this is my own work and that it has not been submitted for a degree at another university.

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Abstract

The British Secret Intelligence Service (SIS) remains one of the most obscure and elusive government agencies. Despite its rich and often tangled past, the SIS withstood various challenges in the twentieth century to become a vital instrument in Britain's foreign policy, offering both traditional intelligence gathering, and a covert action capability. Despite recent revelations about its Cold War history, knowledge about this organisation is uneven at best, and this is particularly so in Asia. Despite Britain's imperial history, which anchored informal intelligence gathering networks on a global scale, SIS's presence in Asia is largely undiscovered. This thesis asks why this lacuna exists in SIS's history; what was SIS activity in this region during the Cold War? Moreover, what was the value of this activity?

Utilising a primarily archival methodology, this thesis sheds light on British intelligence activity in Hong Kong, Beijing, and Hanoi in the late 1960s. The strategic aims are twofold. Firstly, it explores the kinds of intelligence gathered, and the difficulties encountered from operating within the heart of a secure communist state in order to gauge an 'enemy society'. In doing so, it challenges conventional definitions of intelligence, pointing to the notion of a dual identity diplomat-intelligence officer, that provided alternative means of acquiring intelligence within denied areas. In this way, it opens a window into a new dimension of SIS history, and, by extension, GCHQ, both of whom operated from the grey space between diplomacy and intelligence. Secondly, it examines this intelligence through the broader framework of the Anglo-American Special Relationship, given that these three case study countries were areas where the SIS operated, but where the CIA encountered real hindrances due to a lack of diplomatic premises. By tracing the path of British intelligence material, and analysing its reception by its American audience, it ultimately assesses the value of such intelligence. It argues that the granular detail afforded, and the insight on broader strategic relationships it provided, inverted the Special Relationship, rendering Britain a valued partner when it came to intelligence collection in this region and off-setting imbalances elsewhere.

List of Abbreviations

CIA	Central Intelligence Agency
COMINT	Communications Intelligence
DIA	Defence Intelligence Agency
DIS	Defence Intelligence Staff
DVRN	Democratic Republic of Vietnam
DWS	Diplomatic Wireless Service
EXINT	Exile Intelligence
FCO	Foreign and Commonwealth Office
GCHQ	Government Communications Headquarters
HMG	Her Majesty's Government
HUMINT	Human Intelligence
ICC	International Control Commission
IMINT	Imagery Intelligence
INR	United States Bureau of Intelligence and Research
IRD	Information Research Department
JIC	Joint Intelligence Committee
JSIS	Joint Service Intelligence Section
KMT	Kuomintang
LIC	Local Intelligence Committee
MoD	Ministry of Defence
MI5	Military Intelligence, Section 5 (Security Service)
MI6	Military Intelligence, Section 6 (SIS)
NIE	National Intelligence Directorate
NSC	National Security Council
NVA	People's Army of Vietnam (North Vietnamese Army)
OSS	Office for Strategic Services

PLA	People's Liberation Army
PRO	Public Record Office
PRC	People's Republic of China
PWE	Political Warfare Executive
RIO	Regional Information Office
SEATO	South East Asian Treaty Organisation
SOE	Special Operations Executive
SIGINT	Signals intelligence
SIS	Secret Intelligence Service
TNA	The National Archives, Kew
UK	United Kingdom
US	United States of America
USIA	United States Information Agency
USSR	Union of Soviet Socialist Republics

Introduction

BRITAIN'S Secret Intelligence Service (SIS) is one of the most elusive – yet complex – aspects of British Cold War history. Regarded as one of the more controversial components of British reach abroad, the SIS withstood numerous internal and external security challenges in the post-war period to become a vital instrument in Britain's foreign policy, offering a mixture of sensitive reporting and covert action. For almost half a century the Cold War constituted '*the* organising factor' shaping Britain's geo-political choices during a tumultuous period of decolonisation,² in which, in addition to economic decline, Britain lost important strategic territories, and waged violent counterinsurgency campaigns against anti-colonial nationalist movements. Amidst the chaos of decolonisation, intelligence remained central to Britain's post-colonial statecraft as it sought to transform an empire into a New Commonwealth, which might be defined as a new informal empire that sought to leverage cultural and epistemological influence. The nexus of Cold War and the colonies war is therefore where SIS intelligence gathering against adversaries often proved important. SIS was central to what some have called the "fancy footwork" of imperial decline, extending the mirage of British power beyond its material limits at a time of severe economic crisis. This centrality to the projection of power, or perhaps the residue of power, is noteworthy, given the testing political and institutional circumstances under which SIS had to operate, and merits greater scholarly attention.³

² Matthew Grant, 'Introduction', in Matthew Grant (ed.), *The British Way in Cold Warfare: Intelligence, Diplomacy and the Bomb, 1945-1975*, (London, 2009), p. 5.

³ B.R. Tomlinson, 'The Contraction of England: National Decline and the Loss of Empire,' *The Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History*, 11:1 (1982): pp. 58-72.

Empire and intelligence connected in myriad ways. SIS's capability during the Cold War – always limited by constrained budgets – was, in large part, buttressed by the large network of bases and outposts abroad it had cultivated over centuries of empire. This tradition stretched much further back than the imperial era however, raising an important question – who were Britain's spies in the years preceding and during Empire? How did they operate, and what was the significance of these sorts of arrangements? For the most part, Britain's imperial mission determined the relatively informal nature of its intelligence gathering network. Anchored by the necessity to gather knowledge upon competitors and adversaries alike, as well as the need to penetrate the societies in which it built a presence, the underlying assumption was that knowledge equated to power for the British. This was embodied in the East India Company, which laid the foundations for Britain's initial intelligence network at the dawn of empire. Devoid of a thorough understanding of local customs, culture, and beliefs, the British initially relied upon local informants to penetrate what was then largely oral cultures of information-keeping.⁴ Reiterated in Richard Popplewell's study of intelligence and imperial defence of the Indian Empire, Britain was able to defeat violent nationalist movements 'only by developing a complex intelligence network on a global scale' and pre-empting proto-rebellion rather than fighting exhausting wars of counter-insurgency.⁵

Spanning multiple continents, the magnitude of Britain's network was underpinned by the wide spectrum of actors that together formed its nodes. Extensive studies on the various components of British Empire reveal the bewildering mixture of officials, enterprising amateurs, informal agents, archaeologists and delightfully more unconventional figures that were in effect, sources of information, and in many cases, intelligence assets. Devoid of their own subject matter and cultural experts, local informants often embedded themselves amongst British officials, creating a complex information dependency on the part of the British.⁶ Whilst Indian Army officers were key in gathering

⁴ Christopher Allen Bayly, *Empire and Information: Intelligence Gathering and Social Communication in Indian, 1780-1870*, (Cambridge, 1996).

⁵ Richard Popplewell, *Intelligence and Imperial Defence: British Intelligence and the Defence of the Indian Empire, 1904-1924*, (London, 1995), pp. 5-6. See also Richard Popplewell, 'Lacking Intelligence': Some Reflections on Recent Approaches to British Counter-Insurgency, 1900-1960,' *Intelligence and National Security*, 10:2 (1995): pp. 336-352.

⁶ Bayly, *Empire and Information*.

‘intelligence of every kind’, amateur agents – often ‘travellers of independent means – also took part in what has been referred to as ‘this tournament of shadows’.⁷ The other part of the solution to the British gap in knowledge was found in the deployment of Indian hillmen ‘of exception intelligence and resource, specially trained in clandestine surveying techniques’. Disguised as Muslim holy men or Buddhist pilgrims, they were able to explore and map ‘thousands of square miles of previously unexplored terrain with remarkable accuracy’.⁸ Similarly, Edwardian agents formed the basis of Britain’s informal network of spies in Arabia, imitating local nomads as a technique for illicit intelligence gathering, before utilising this for conducting aerial surveillance and desert warfare over Iraq, Syria, Jordan, and Saudi Arabia.⁹ Lastly, in Chinese Turkestan, where the ‘collision’ of three empires – Britain, the Soviet Union, and China – drew scientists and academics into the intelligence collection network. Gathering information on the other’s influence and activities in Xinjiang, the line between science and espionage ‘was thin and blurred’, demonstrating another element to Britain’s informal intelligence tradition.¹⁰

Asia was also a fascinating sphere for historical intelligence efforts conducted by regional actors with their own distinguished espionage traditions. This too points to the lack of formal boundaries that characterise present-day professionalised intelligence services. In early twentieth century China, for example, the substantial internal security apparatus established upon Dai Li and the Kuomintang was in fact a ‘bewildering array’ of organisations including societies, unions, clubs, and other civil bodies, leading to what Fred Wakeman has described as the presence of ‘tens of thousands of spies’ in China by the end of the Second World War.¹¹ Pointing to the important role of globalisation in linking the movement of refugees across Europe and China to information collection and espionage, Miller points to the processes of war and revolution in China, Spain, Italy, and

⁷ Peter Hopkirk, *The Great Game: On Secret Service in High Asia*, (New York, 1994), p. 5.

⁸ Ibid; Popplewell, *Intelligence and Imperial Defence*, p. 19.

⁹ Priya Satia, *Spies in Arabia: The Great War and the Cultural Foundations of Britain’s Covert Empire in the Middle East*, (New York, 2008).

¹⁰ Michael B. Share, ‘The Great Game Revisited: Three Empires Collide in Chinese Turkestan (Xinjiang)’, *Europe-Asia Studies*, 67:7 (2015), pp. 1116-1118.

¹¹ Frederic Wakeman, *Spymaster: Dai Li and the Chinese Secret Service*, (Berkeley, 2003).

Bolshevik Russia as developing a spy presence during the interwar period.¹² Such networks were not territorially confined either; Elphick notes that a plethora of actors informed Japanese ‘ground’ intelligence, including disguised Japanese officers who exploited the naval option, exploiting fishing fleets over the southern seas to spy upon naval and merchant ships belonging to other Pacific powers.¹³

Grounded in multiple empires, informal intelligence gathering therefore had deep foundations across the globe by 1900. However, Britain’s imperial network took on a particular significance in Asia, where its attention gradually turned not only towards countering the threat posed by the Soviet Union and Communist China, but also to managing their rivalry in an increasingly incendiary region. Accordingly, intelligence requirements from Asia took on a greater sense of urgency, anchoring SIS’s regional role there in intelligence collection. It is here that the notion of a ‘residual empire’¹⁴ – bases and territories that once formally belonged to Britain – took on a greater importance into the Cold War. The Cold War was hotter in Asia than anywhere else, with the use of nuclear weapons being contemplated during the Korean War, the Taiwan Straits crisis and the Vietnam War. Britain also fought its largest conflict of the Cold War period in that region, an undeclared war against Indonesia. The SIS intelligence contribution was valued by London and also by their allies in Washington and Canberra.¹⁵ Yet, remarkably, despite SIS’s extensive involvement in the Asian sphere, its absence from the historical record is especially noteworthy, particularly given Britain’s tradition of intelligence gathering in the region.

This is particularly noticeable if one considers the nature of intelligence gathering itself. Amongst contemporary scholarship, intelligence is characterised across different categories; conventional understandings of intelligence tend to treat secrecy, rather than knowledge as the principal organising category for intelligence history. However, when conceptualised as a form of

¹² Michael Miller, *Shanghai on the Metro: Spies, Intrigue, and the French between the Wars*, (Stanford, 1994).

¹³ Peter Elphick, *Far Eastern File: Intelligence War in the Far East, 1930-45*, (London, 1997).

¹⁴ R.J. Aldrich, ‘“The Value of Residual Empire”: Anglo-American Intelligence Co-Operation in Asia after 1945’, R.J. Aldrich and M. Hopkins, *Intelligence, Defence and Diplomacy: British Policy in the Post-War World* (London: 1994): 226-58.

¹⁵ Brian Toohey and William Pinwill, *Oyster: the Story of the Australian Secret Intelligence Service* (Melbourne: Heinemann, 1989).

knowledge that informs policy or operations, a broader perspective becomes clear: intelligence activities can be conducted by organisations other than the secret intelligence services.¹⁶ The blurring of boundaries between intelligence and diplomacy is one of the most transparent areas in which this crossover becomes visible. This overlap is historically rooted too; in addition to the aforementioned history of imperial Britain's informal intelligence network, the use of secret services to conduct diplomacy was 'characteristic of pre-modern inter-state relations' across the world.¹⁷

This blurring of boundaries is by no means confined to intelligence and diplomacy either; the Cold War saw numerous convergences of diplomacy, intelligence, liaison, covert action, and propaganda across various agencies. The role of the British SIS in the Northern Ireland peace process, the role of the Israeli Mossad in Middle Eastern diplomacy efforts, and the CIA's relationship with the Palestine Liberation Organisations are all examples of secret intelligence services' hands in peace processes usually reserved for diplomatic personnel.¹⁸ Taking into account its imperial forebears, SIS's intelligence gathering abroad neatly captured the intersection of intelligence with many different spheres of activity. A significant amount of this took place under the auspice of diplomatic and consular outposts, in which SIS officers also took on the roles of diplomatic personnel or passport control officers. This raises important questions as to the nature of intelligence gathering itself, above all, in light of Britain's remnants of empire. Moreover, it problematises the actors, process, and substance of SIS's gathering, and crucially, suggests further examination is needed at the nexus of intelligence and diplomacy.

Furthermore, if SIS held an active role in underpinning Britain's foreign policy during the Cold War, then its significance was determined in part by the broader strategic partnerships that it influenced. Whilst the Sino-Soviet spilt was a key rivalry that dominated regional geopolitics during this period, so too was the Anglo-American 'Special Relationship'. Britain's global decline had

¹⁶ Len Scott, 'Secret Intelligence, Covert Action, and Clandestine Diplomacy', *Intelligence and National Security*, 19:2 (2004), p. 162; Andrew Mumford, 'Covert Peacemaking: Clandestine Negotiations and Backchannels with the Provisional IRA during the Early 'Troubles, 1972–76,' *The Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History*, 39:4 (2011): pp. 633-648.

¹⁷ Ibid, p. 169. See also Herman, *Intelligence Power in Peace and War* (Cambridge, 1996), p. 119.

¹⁸ Ibid, p.170.

rendered it a ‘less valuable ally and intelligence partner’,¹⁹ and thus, an arguably exaggerated ‘special relationship’ with the US lent a false credence to Britain’s continued role in the world, still aspiring to a place on the UN Security Council and a capability for global military intervention. The inverse also applied; Herman argues that the partnership with the US had ‘undoubtedly been conditioned by the high priority given to maintain the secret intelligence link with Washington’.²⁰ London therefore sought to ‘give force to a new myth’ – it sought to construct a relationship with the US that preserved the illusion of post-imperial power.²¹ This wider political context was ultimately what grounded the SIS’s pursuit of both strategic and tactical intelligence from its constellation of diplomatic outposts across Asia.

With this context in mind, this thesis’s central research questions are as follows:

- What kinds of intelligence were the British able to gather in Asia during the Cold War, and how was this achieved?
- What was the significance of this intelligence?
- How did it relate to the ‘Special Relationship’ between the UK and the US?
- How does this change our understanding of what intelligence is?

The question remains, however: why is this period of SIS’s history in Asia, which after all concerned at its core less than a hundred personnel, significant and worth studying?

As Moran observes, one of the key challenges intelligence historians face in today’s field is to resist the urge to study the British intelligence community in geographic isolation.²² Without traction in a broader, comparative framework, much of the literature becomes ‘parochial and Panglossian’; that is,

¹⁹ Jeffreys-Jones, *In Spies We Trust: the story of western intelligence*, (Oxford, 2013), p. 128.

²⁰ Herman, *Intelligence Power*, p. 124.

²¹ Jeffreys-Jones, *In Spies We Trust*, p. 129.

²² Moran, ‘Coming to Clarity’, p. 50.

accepting of the unique and incomparable make-up of British institutions, and reluctant to analyse thematic issues in a broader transnational context'.²³ Furthermore, the pursuit of intelligence history is made increasingly difficult by the reliance upon 'fragments, not files' of historical material as sources. As Herman notes – and particularly in the context of the Cold War – rumour and myth become 'so intertwined with fact' in a sphere as enigmatic as intelligence, that to a certain extent, 'just beyond the reach of living memory, truth and fiction can no longer be separated'.²⁴

Although intelligence history has gone from strength to strength since the publication of the Mission Dimension manifesto by Andrew and Dilks in July 1984, much of it is overly descriptive and often takes the form of 'regimental history'. Precisely because intelligence services exist to provide a service to military or diplomatic activities, they are hard to contextualise and the uses to which their information was put is often not recorded in detail. Few prime ministers record in their diary that they read a Joint Intelligence Committee paper at ten o'clock in the morning and an hour later took action as a result. Intelligence rarely works like this and often contributes to a climate of opinion, or a perspective. These incremental contributions to policy-making are especially hard to detect in the written record or even through interview. As a result, so much intelligence history is focused on individuals or institutions. This thesis seeks to escape that problem, insofar as the limited records allow.²⁵

The obstacles to writing an history of SIS in Asia in its major diplomatic outposts are therefore substantial, and demand an effective approach that gives meaning to its past. However, as Walsh notes, analysis Cold War intelligence 'offers valuable methodological rewards'; unlocking one chapter of intelligence history can also uncover pieces of institutional history, assessments behind policymaking decisions, international relations, and assessments of internal security and political situations in other Cold War countries.²⁶ Relating SIS's history in Asia to the Anglo-American Special Relationship therefore offers a means of overcoming these challenges and providing a clear

²³ Ibid.

²⁴ Herman, *Intelligence Power in Peace and War*, p. 22.

²⁵ Nevertheless, organisational approaches have their place - for an excellent example deploying sociological method see P. H. J. Davies, *The MI6 and the Machinery of Spying*, (London, 2004).

²⁶ James Igoe Walsh, *The international Politics of Intelligence Sharing*, (New York, 2012), p. 30.

operational and policy context. In this respect, this thesis's contribution to knowledge can be regarded on three levels; firstly, it interrogates the relationship between intelligence and diplomacy, questioning the sharp distinction that has often been drawn by Cold War historians. Secondly, it analyses the nature and texture of SIS in Asia, through an examination of its intelligence activities in Hong Kong, Beijing, and Hanoi. Thirdly, it offers to reconstruct an element of one of Britain's key strategic partnerships – the Special Relationship with the Americans – in which SIS held a degree of indirect influence, as these three cities were locations in which the Americans experienced significant intelligence shortcomings because of the absence of US representation in North Vietnam or China. In all three locations, the Americans were dependant on their British allies. Accordingly, these cities, all centres of Cold War espionage, provide fascinating case studies.

* * *

The following section outlines the structure of the thesis, in accordance with the central research questions and methodology – outlined in the following chapter. Before delving into the content of the three case studies, the thesis presents an historical chapter on the 'residue of Empire' in Asia. It offers a regional overview of British engagement in Asia from both a foreign policy perspective, and an intelligence standpoint, beginning from the Second World War, and stretching into the mid-Cold War in the 1960s. Detailing the involvement of MI5, SIS, and GCHQ across the region (particularly the latter two, in terms of human intelligence and signals intelligence against foreign targets), it recounts British intelligence gathering activity, occasionally contrasting it against American activity where possible. Whilst it admittedly cannot provide an overview of every country in Asia, it paints a picture of complex Cold War tensions in China, Burma, India, Hong Kong, and Taiwan as they related to the 'Special Relationship' between Britain and the United States. Its purpose is to contextualise British intelligence objectives and activity in the case study chapters; it grounds the argument that Britain's 'residual empire' afforded it a gravitas in the region that the Americans were often unable to access. It

also casts up the paradox of two countries that co-operated closely on intelligence in Cold War Asia despite overarching strategies that were notably divergent.

Following the historical context chapter, the thesis presents a literature review of existing scholarship on intelligence. It engages with several different areas of academic debate or scholarship for two key purposes: firstly, these discussions will provide a broader framework in which to situate the thesis's main arguments and findings. Secondly, identifying problems and omissions in the existing literature will allow the thesis to locate its main contribution to knowledge. The chapter commences by outlining the definitional debate over what constitutes 'intelligence'. It compares and contrasts different perspectives on what intelligence *is*, by both scholars and practitioners, in order to align itself with a particular definition of intelligence as something akin to a 'spectrum'. It then identifies the main schools of thought on the 'Special Relationship'; it compares traditionalist and revisionist interpretations in terms of how they differ on the power dynamics between Britain and the United States, lending particularly attention to the notion of 'diplomatic divergence'. Finally, the chapter provides an overview of existing literature on the Special Intelligence Relationship in Asia. Whilst it draws attention to the key pieces of work already existing on British and American intelligence, it also highlights the gaps in our knowledge of the British Secret Intelligence Service in Asia. The latter is of particular importance in locating the thesis's contribution to knowledge on British intelligence history.

The next three chapters constitute case studies of British intelligence gathering efforts in Asia. As discussed above, these chapters explore intelligence gathering activities in Hong Kong, Beijing, and Hanoi – three locations in which the Americans were notably dependent on British facilities or territories. Importantly, they seek to weave together the various strands of argument presented in the introduction. Most notably, they lend depth to the notion that British intelligence gathering in these three locations was able to offset the asymmetry of Britain's more junior position in 'Special Intelligence Relationship' with the United States.

The first case study examines Britain's 'watchtower' from Hong Kong, making a connection between Britain's Cold War intelligence gathering networks across Asia and its imperial legacy from previous centuries, consisting as often as not of treaty ports, concessions and unequal trading

relationships rather than formal colonies. The chapter pays special attention to the history of Anglo-American tensions in Hong Kong during the Cold War, which were often economic, and utilises this as the backdrop for broader intelligence gathering efforts, particularly the rift caused by CIA covert action in the colony. Outlining the shortcomings of US intelligence there, it goes on to outline Britain's various intelligence functions, illustrating the ways in which British intelligence at times held greater reliability, owing to its imperial past and historic connections with the mainland. It discusses both signals intelligence and human intelligence, including the GCHQ station at Little Sai Wan, as well both overt and covert intelligence that British intelligence personnel were able to collate - though not without consideration of the constraints they experienced at the same time. Lastly, examining the core thematic areas of intelligence focus - most notably Sino-Soviet tensions, above all as they related to nuclear developments - it briefly delves into American use of this intelligence to inform their own, high-level assessments. The chapter also provides background for the following two case studies, in terms of the nature of the intelligence gathered, the laborious security conditions, and the manner in which the resulting intelligence on the Chinese mainland was consumed by an eager American audience.

The second case study moves on to explore the presence of SIS officers in a diplomatic post under much more serious and hostile circumstances. It examines the British outpost in Beijing at the height of the Cultural Revolution, centring itself around the tumultuous events of 1967, in which the British Embassy there was ransacked, and its staff attacked. Outlining the repercussions of the violent, rapid change that Beijing found itself subject to, it utilises this episode to reveal broader political and intelligence tensions at play, between Britain, the United States, and China, offering a different perspective on the Special Intelligence Relationship. Grippled by a 'spy phobia' that rendered the capital outwardly hostile towards foreigners, Beijing was a peculiar environment in which the British sought to gather intelligence, yet were hindered by strict information security. Matters were made worse by the loss of core equipment during the embassy ransacking, and a paucity of contact with the local population. Nonetheless, the chapter argues that despite the formidable security environment - one in which the Americans lacked any presence due to non-recognition of the PRC - British intelligence was able to satiate the American appetite for the most basic of details on life in Beijing, as

well as higher level military intelligence - another dimension to the 'residual empire' argument in Asia. With particular attention to Chinese internal security and US intelligence consumption, the chapter's ultimate suggestion is that what was considered 'intelligence' was determined by its audience and consumer. In a strict security environment, even seemingly mundane reporting was considered valuable, reinforcing the notion of intelligence as a 'spectrum' rather than a distinct and separate category.

The final case study examines the British Consulate-General in Hanoi, analysing the presence of six intelligence officers stationed there. Echoing the challenging security conditions – and restrictions - that the British Embassy staff in Beijing was subject to, the chapter focuses itself upon 1967 – the year in which the Consulate-General in Hanoi significantly lost its capability to transmit outbound messages using cyphers. Tying together the previous two case studies, it offers two arguments that question the utility of narrower definitions of intelligence: firstly, it grapples with the notion of the dual identity diplomat-intelligence officer, suggesting that this dual role was what facilitated a broad span of intelligence collection from the very centre of such hostile territories. Secondly, it suggests that as in Hong Kong and Beijing, intelligence is, to some extent, defined in the eye of the beholder. It lends depth to the latter argument through its exploration of the 'spy phobia' phenomenon that pervaded Hanoi, just as it did Beijing and Hong Kong. Moreover, by using the archives to trace the path of the British intelligence material that reached its counterparts across the Atlantic, it suggests that the eager consumption of this material by the American defence and intelligence community was what also rendered the less covert reporting by this rather beleaguered station to be considered valuable 'intelligence'. Situated at 'ground zero' for the American bombing campaign against Hanoi, this reporting came from a vital 'blind spot' for the Americans as they waged their campaign in Vietnam. There can be few better examples of intelligence offsetting the wider asymmetry of the Special Relationship.

Methodology

Reading the Archive

Intelligence history has long been regarded as one of the more obscure fields of modern historical study. This is not least due to the many obstacles it poses for the contemporary researcher. Despite the collection of information on an industrial scale during the Cold War, researching intelligence during this period is somewhat ironically plagued by archival paucity, problems of information secrecy, access to records, state control over access to interviewees, and of course, information reliability. Indeed, such problems have beset the study of intelligence to such an extent that many historians have often disregarded its value, and more often than not, its centrality, to the history of both modern state and non-state actors. Some even feared that their own work would be ‘tainted’ by contact with the dubious subject of intelligence.¹

It is for this reason that historians such as Andrew and Walton have aptly referred to intelligence history as the ‘missing dimension’ of the modern state. It is no accident that Andrew began his career as a historian of empire, or that Walton has completed the standard account of intelligence and post-war empire, and both conclude that the missing dimension is especially remarkable for its absence in accounts of decolonisation - the key period which this thesis focuses upon.² Noting that British intelligence activities are ‘conspicuously missing’ from core colonial histories of the post-Second World War period, without the avowal of the British intelligence

¹ Donald C. Watt, ‘Intelligence and the Historian: A Comment on John Gaddis’s “Intelligence, Espionage, and Cold War Origins”’ *Diplomatic History* 14:2 (1990), pp. 197-9.

² Calder Walton, *Empire of Secrets: British Intelligence, the Cold War, and the Twilight of Empire*, (London, 2013), p. xxi; Christopher Andrew and David Dilks, *The Missing Dimension: Governments and Intelligence Communities in the Twentieth Century*, (Urbana, 1984).

services' existence - and by extension, their records - Walton argues that intelligence was 'quietly and subtly airbrushed out of the history books'.³ As other intelligence scholars have argued, empire was very much about information, and so this has impoverished the historical record, inhibiting a fuller understanding of the different dimensions of empire and decolonisation, as well as a better understanding of the relationship between state, intelligence service, and subject population.

With the avowal of the existence of the British intelligence services (MI5 was given statutory basis in 1989, and SIS in 1994), came the subsequent release of more records affording greater depth to the study of intelligence history and, supposedly greater transparency (the latter according to the government).⁴ In addition to the two aforementioned intelligence services, some records of other intelligence-related departments such as the Ministry for Economic Warfare (MEW), the Naval Intelligence Division (NID), the Political Warfare Executive (PWE), the Special Operations Executive (SOE), the Government Communications Headquarters (GCHQ), and the Joint Intelligence Committee (JIC) have been released into the National Archives (TNA).⁵ It is also worth noting that SIS and GCHQ have been the most hesitant with regard to releasing post-war records.

All these declassifications are limited in scale, but the advantages of such releases are nevertheless clear; as Hughes has argued, access to previously hidden aspects of history do not merely shed light upon intelligence as a practice, but also the broader dynamics of policy-making, and the institutional context in which intelligence operated. Moran, for example, draws attention to the way in which 'attention to the form and function of espionage' following archival releases has been able to challenge existing orthodoxies concerning international relations and governance.⁶ In this sense, Hughes labels the historical study of intelligence an 'especially fertile area' for understanding the interplay between belief systems, cultural peculiarities, and the wider structural factors that affect policy-making in international politics.⁷ It is for this reason that Walton has argued that without

³ Walton, *Empire of Secrets*, p. xxi.

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ Nigel West, 'A Skewed Survey of the UK's Intelligence History', *International Journal for Intelligence and Counterintelligence*, 22:4 (2009), p. 746.

⁶ Christopher Moran, 'Coming to Clarity: The Pursuit of Intelligence History: Methods, Sources, and Trajectories in the United Kingdom', *Studies in Intelligence*, 55:2 (2011), p. 37.

⁷ R. Gerald Hughes, Peter Jackson, Len Scott, *Exploring Intelligence Archives: Enquiries into the Secret State*, eds. (Abingdon, 2008), p. 3.

understanding the intelligence dimension of the British Empire, our scholastic understanding of it is 'at best incomplete, and at worst fundamentally flawed'.⁸

However, with the release of such records has also come deeper enquiry and reflection on the part of researchers as to the relationship between state and archive. As Hughes et al. have stated, interpretation of the archival record 'lies at the heart of historical enquiry'.⁹ This raises important questions about the methodology of working with archival documents pertaining to intelligence. Not only does the study of intelligence prompt us to reflect upon national differences in scholarly approaches and cultural backgrounds,¹⁰ but the very nature of the archival releases themselves yield clues as to the manner in which institutions, bureaucracies, and officialdom operated. This raises difficulties, however; as Hammond notes, writing intelligence history also means dealing with agencies that by their very nature, compartmentalise their knowledge, are shrouded in secrecy, and often rely upon information sharing on a need-to-know basis (even internally).¹¹ To some extent, this touches upon another core element of intelligence and its relationship with the state; that of secrecy. Drawing upon Moran's extensive study of secrecy as it pertains to intelligence and the modern British state, national archives could be considered a key component of information control.¹² This has been particularly true of previous decades; in the 1970s and 1980s, prior to the disclosure of the intelligence services' existence, the dearth of records on the intelligence services was a real inhibitor to effective scholarship. He argues that, the 'taboo of secrecy' around the intelligence services was very much supported by the 'indefinite closure of service records', thus denying the historian the most basic of resources.¹³ Defined by Wilsnack as 'the processes used to make sure that certain people will or will not have access to certain information at certain times', the release - and retention - of records is a vital dimension of archival research, and one that uniquely constrains the intelligence historian.¹⁴

⁸ Walton, *Empire of Secrets*, p. xxii.

⁹ Hughes, Jackson, and Scott, *Exploring Intelligence Archives*, p. 4.

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ Andrew Hammond, 'Through a Glass, Darkly: The CIA and Oral History', *The Journal of the Historical Association*, 100:340 (2015), p. 323.

¹² Christopher Moran, *Classified: Secrecy and the State in Modern Britain*, (Cambridge, 2013), p. 3.

¹³ Moran, 'Coming to Clarity', p. 34.

¹⁴ R.W. Wilsnack, 'Information Control: A Conceptual Framework for Sociological Analysis', *Journal of Contemporary Ethnography*, 8:1 (1980): 467-499,

Gill has argued that a seeming greater openness and accountability masks and effort at greater control. He suggests that, just as the reform and liberalisation of the Official Secrets Act in fact served merely to remove any possibility of a public interest defence, so the liberalisation of the information regime around intelligence in the 1990s was in fact designed to shape public perceptions of secret service in a way that allowed government to re-assert control in an area where many unauthorised releases had occurred.¹⁵ An example of this is the prioritisation of the release of intelligence records relating to wartime rather than peacetime - on the basis that spying and covert action are more justifiable at times of existential threat to the state and society.

Perhaps the greatest challenge is to be found in seeking the records of an agency whose existence was not only disclosed until merely two decades ago, but also which is the only British intelligence agency not to pass on its records to The National Archives. The refusal by the British Secret Intelligence Service (SIS) to disclose its records has led numerous scholars to question the extent to which the story of this particular institution can ever be known. SIS has released the records of the wartime SOE organisation that were in its care, and some SIS records are intermingled with the records of MI5. Furthermore, some SIS records are contained in the files of the Foreign Office Permanent Under-Secretary's Department, a section of the Foreign Office designed to co-ordinate intelligence, covert action, and foreign policy. But, even these limited records now in the TNA do not extend beyond the 1950s. Meanwhile, the records that SIS retains in its own archives are much less complete than those of either MI5 or GCHQ.¹⁶

West, for example, one of the first researchers to write at length about MI6, muses as to whether the study of an institution without its own original records leads to 'mixed results', as scholars have to rely upon other sources.¹⁷ Probing the delicate issue of 'misstating SIS's history', West asks that, with a somewhat precarious foundation for such research, how do scholars form judgements as to what was, or was not accomplished by the SIS? Moreover, without SIS's original

¹⁵ Peter Gill, Reasserting control: Recent changes in the oversight of the UK: Intelligence, Threat, Risk and the Challenge of Oversight, *Intelligence and National Security*, 11:2 (1996) 313-331

¹⁶ SOE records are in the HS series and MI5 records are in the KV series. The files of PUSD have been released into FO 1093. Information from Keith Jeffery, MI6 official historian.

¹⁷ Nigel West, *The Friends: Britain's Post-war Secret Intelligence Operations* (London, 1988).

files, 'how are the authors able to assess the true extent of the damage inflicted by each man?'¹⁸

Intelligence has gradually moved from the periphery of government to the centre over the last century, and so our knowledge of the British policy machine is incomplete without considering the role of SIS. But, how does the scholar achieve as full an understanding as possible of the Service without recourse to estimation, rumour, or inadvertent error?

This raises important questions about the intelligence historian as a 'prisoner of the archive'. Researchers are constrained not only by the availability of documents within the archive, but also by the very policies that determine document retention, classification, and in the case of British Empire, document destruction. This creates, in effect, an enslavement to the archival record. As Hammond observes, intelligence historians are often 'just far enough away from the inner working of the institution, yet just close enough in terms of release dependency' from the archive.¹⁹ This problem is by no means confined to Britain's SIS either. Reflecting upon his extensive research into GCHQ, Easter laments the lack of signals intelligence featuring in studies of British foreign policy or military strategy after 1945 owing to the key problem of 'official secrecy'.²⁰ Placing emphasis upon the British governments efforts to 'prevent the disclosure of information on GCHQ' (including details such as the organisation's budget), he observes that just as with SIS, GCHQ's archives are exempt from the normal thirty year declassification rule, whilst 'virtually no documents' have been released to the National Archives for the period after 1945. All the three intelligence security agencies are exempt for the Freedom of Information Act. Furthermore, indirect references to signals intelligence in Foreign Office, Prime Minister's Office, and Ministry of Defence documents are 'routinely redacted', illustrating the extent of efforts to which the government has sought to stem the release of information.²¹

From a methodological perspective, Walton notes that, unlike other historians, intelligence historians encounter the unique problem of having to rely upon the actual subjects under examination

¹⁸ Nigel West, 'A Skewed Survey of the UK's Intelligence History', *International Journal for Intelligence and Counterintelligence*, 22:4 (2009), pp. 749-752.

¹⁹ Hammond, 'Through a Glass, Darkly, the CIA and Oral History', p. 321.

²⁰ David Easter, 'GCHQ and British External Policy in the 1960s', *Intelligence and National Security*, 23:5 (2008), p. 681.

²¹ Ibid

(the intelligence services) themselves to reveal their own history.²² Alarmingly, this is rather like the lab rat being in charge of the experiment. In reflecting upon the challenges of researching state history, Aldrich similarly observes the uniqueness of intelligence history in that ‘nowhere else is the researcher confronted with evidence precisely managed by their subject’. In this respect, he argues that intelligence historians essentially ‘are what they eat’, their diet is effectively managed by the archives they access and the departmental record officers that determine what is released. In the last decade, the opening of particular batches of records, especially from MI5 relating to the period 1930-1960, or wartime SOE records, has led to a growing culture of archival dependency in which doctoral students only attack subjects that the government has released records on. This is reinforced by the emphasis in universities on the timely completion of theses and anxiety about resistant subjects and elusive data.²³

In a similar vein to the issues raised by West, Walton observes that this inevitably raises the question of to what extent the state is able to dictate its own history by shaping the past - to what extent can the intelligence historian trust the documents they receive exposure to in the archive, or are they ‘presented merely with a version of the past as the intelligence services want us to see it’?²⁴ Historians of intelligence have reached a broad consensus about the nature of the problem but are divided about what to do about it, or how optimistic to be in the face of a laconic secret state.

A Lesson in Empire

The question of access and archives is perhaps most poignant when it comes to the history of empire. As we have seen, there is an emerging consensus amongst scholars suggesting that the relationship between the public archive and secret state is deep-rooted, which bears significant implications upon researchers’ access to documents. Nowhere is this issue better demonstrated than through the

²² Walton, *Empire of Secrets*, p. 353.

²³ Richard Aldrich, *The Hidden Hand: Britain, America, and Cold War Secret Intelligence* (London, 2001), p. 6.

²⁴ Walton, *Empire of Secrets*, p. 353.

extensive destruction of records that took place during British decolonisation in the 1950s and 1960s. No discussion of research methodology in the realm would be complete without attention to the case of the ‘Hanslope Disclosure’ – the discovery of around 8,800 previously ‘lost’ files from British colonies at the British government’s Hanslope Park facilities by Professor David Anderson in April 2012. Its significance is twofold; firstly, the case generated significant debate amongst scholars as to the archival process *itself*, in terms of selecting, retaining, and destroying official records. Secondly, the disclosure had reverberations in a real world context, raising significant legal repercussions for the British government. Thirdly, in 2015, David Anderson uncovered the existence of further legacy archives in seven departments of state, including Foreign and Commonwealth Office, Ministry of Defence, and Treasury amounting to millions of files that have been excluded arbitrarily from the provision of the Public Record Office Act. Pertaining to intelligence records in particular, this case brings to the fore the unique methodological difficulties faced by intelligence historians of the British Empire.²⁵

Detailed in the Cary Report, the documents were discovered as part of a legal case brought forward by former Mau Mau rebels against the Foreign Office in the early 2000s. The rebels sought compensation for alleged torture that took place at the hands of British government officials during its counterinsurgency campaign in Kenya in the 1950s – one that has widely been acknowledged by scholars as notoriously violent on the part of the British government security forces. Despite several legal requests by the representative of the rebels, Leigh Day – who were advised by several prominent historians aware of a trail of missing documents – the Foreign Office denied their possession, until they were discovered by chance, a few days preceding the trial.²⁶ The sudden revelation of the existence of the documents – in contravention of the normal procedures for withholding state papers – was crucial in provoking scholars to critically rethink the relationship between the state and the archive.

²⁵ Ian Cobain and Richard Norton-Taylor, 'Files that may shed light on colonial crimes still kept secret by UK', *The Guardian*, 26th April 2013. Information from David Anderson, September 2015.

²⁶ For more information, see Anthony Cary, 'The Migrated Archives', *Foreign and Commonwealth Office*, 24th February 2011. See also David Anderson, 'Guilty Secrets: Deceit, Denial, and the Discovery of Kenya's 'Migrated Archive'', *History Workshop Journal*, 80 (2015), p. 142-160.

Tracing the path of the ‘migrated archive’ at Hanslope has given rise to some startling observations that raise questions about the state’s ability to manipulate historical narratives on a large scale. In the case of Kenya, which was one of the more refined approaches to document retention, all files relating to intelligence, or that were graded ‘Top Secret’ were to either be incinerated, or ‘packed in weighted crates and dumped in very deep and current free water at maximum practicable distance from the coast’.²⁷ These would generate the issue of a ‘destruction certificate’ documenting the files’ eradication, copies of which were sent to London,²⁸ creating a trail for contemporary historians to pursue. The surviving documents were ‘migrated’ to London, on the grounds of having the potential to embarrass the British government or associated persons, containing sources of intelligence information, or risking being ‘used unethically’ by ministers in a successive government.²⁹

Yet, even this process was replete with omissions. In addition to the Kenya files, records from thirty-six other colonies were discovered at Hanslope Park. However, amongst these, substantial gaps remained that earned the British government a bitter reception from historians; the bulk of Aden files were incinerated by the India Office Library Records Department in 1966 to 1967, whilst thirteen top secret files that were not part of the migrated archive but part of the legal case have still not been found. In the words of Tony Badger, a top Cambridge historian who conducted an independent inquiry into the matter, the loss was ‘much greater’ than these thirteen files, pointing to a listing of 170 boxes of British Colonial and Overseas Territories files marked Top Secret, that have gone missing since their removal to Hanslope Park in the 1990s.³⁰

All this points to the most vital question to arise from the documents’ disclosure – which files still remain missing, hidden from public knowledge, or destroyed without a documented trail? What is the scale of deception perpetrated on Britain’s historians of overseas policy? Whilst some scholars such as Badger attributed this to mundane problems of record management,³¹ the majority of scholars

²⁷ Ibid, p. 147.

²⁸ Caroline Elkins, ‘Archives, Intelligence and Secrecy: The Cold War and the End of the British Empire’, in Leake and Adams, *Decolonisation and the Cold War: Negotiating Independence*, (London, 2015), pp. 256-258.

²⁹ Anderson, ‘Guilty Secrets: Deceit, Denial, and Discovery of Kenya’s ‘Migrated Archive’’, p. 147.

³⁰ Anthony Badger, ‘Historians, A Legacy of Suspicion and the ‘Migrated Archives’’, *Small Wars and Insurgencies*, 23:4-5 (2012), pp. 804-806.

³¹ Ibid, pp. 799-806.

were much more critical, considering the retention of the files as a deliberate plot, and a ‘cover up of massive proportions’.³²³³ As scholars such as Walton have argued, the removal of certain files (on the official pretext that they might ‘embarrass’ Her Majesty’s Government) was able to ‘inculcate a fictional history of its colonial benevolence’, distorting historians’ understandings of empire.³⁴ Even the more conservative could not help but notice the discrepancies in the process; Badger himself acknowledged the power of destruction, in noting ‘the absence of material that historians feel should be in the migrated archive’.³⁵ Historians should be congratulated for their forensic discovery of files that were not there, but little can be done to recover the information that has been destroyed; the elephant in the room is therefore – what, exactly, has been destroyed? And how much?

The implications of the various omissions and discoveries were profound. The Mau Mau case resulted in a landmark decision against the British government, in which the Foreign Office set an historical precedent by conceding its affiliation with practices of torture and abuse during the conflict, underlined in its agreement to pay compensation to over five thousand victims.³⁶ As Anderson argues, this confirmed the practice of torture as ‘widespread, amounting a systematic pattern of state policy’.³⁷ Moreover, more crucial from a methodological point of view, the files’ disclosure gave rise to a new set of voices, re-writing a key aspect of Britain’s decolonisation history. Given the manner in which the colonial archives had previously been treated as ‘liminal’ in character,³⁸ their revelation allowed a new historical narrative to be written into history that defied the state’s previous attempts to manipulate its own past.

³² Walton, *Empire of Secrets*, p. xxii.

³³ For more information, see Badger, ‘Historians, A Legacy of Suspicion and the ‘Migrated Archives’’, pp. 799-807; Gregory Rawlings, ‘Lost Files, Forgotten Papers and Colonial Disclosures: The ‘Migrated Archives’ and the Pacific, 1963-2013’, *The Journal of Pacific History*, 50:2 (2015), pp. 189-212; Benjamin Grob-Fitzgibbon, ‘Further Thoughts on the Imperial Endgame and Britain’s Dirty Wars’, *The Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History*, 40:3 (2012), pp. 503-514; Caroline Elkins, ‘Alchemy of Evidence: Mau Mau, the British Empire, and the High Court of Justice’, *The Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History*, 39:5 (2011), pp. 731-748.

³⁴ Ibid.

³⁵ Badger, ‘Historians, A Legacy of Suspicion, and the ‘Migrated Archives’’, p. 804.

³⁶ Anderson, ‘Guilty Secrets: Deceit, Denial, and Discovery of Kenya’s ‘Migrated Archive’’, p. 157.

³⁷ David M. Anderson, ‘British Abuse and Torture in Kenya’s Counterinsurgency, 1952-1960’, *Small Wars and Insurgencies*, 23:4-5 (2012), p. 700.

³⁸ Anderson, ‘Guilty Secrets: Deceit, Denial, and Discovery of Kenya’s ‘Migrated Archive’’, p. 145.

Accordingly, the Hanslope Disclosure raises important questions as to the veracity of the archive and its review process. Despite the several different layers of review the migrated files were subject to – which Anderson has documented in considerable detail – none of these yielded assurances as to the reliability of the selection process in determining which documents survived.³⁹ The broader importance of the case therefore lies in its implications for understanding the ontology of knowledge drawn from the archive. As Elkins argues, there is an intimate connection between the ‘deeply political nature of archives and the production of historical knowledge’,⁴⁰ which, in this case, demonstrated the ability of the state to obscure its role in systematised violence during Empire. As Anderson underlines, destruction is itself a component of this process; asserting that archives have historically been the product of negotiation, selectivity, and censorship, ‘destruction is thus necessarily constitutive to the archival process’, in ordering knowledge according to its most powerful actors.⁴¹

This carries significant implications for the process of ‘writing history’. Drayton argues the manner in which ‘contemporary’ history is written is conditional upon the ‘constant’ pressure of ideas about earlier historical pasts. History is thus continually reconstituted – and the discovery of such files plays a vital role in moving away from the ‘modes of subjectivity’ that historians are usually subject to.⁴² However, this comes with a note of caution. Singling out intelligence historians and the peculiar kinds of privileged and highly-classified material they eventually have access to, Drayton points out that this can also render the historian hostage to the sources’ perspective – ‘a kind of intellectual Stockholm Syndrome’.⁴³ Like government ministers who were once the customers of the intelligence agencies, historians can also come to believe that the ‘Top Secret’ classification equates to ‘true facts’. Therefore, whilst on the one hand, the discovery of new files from formerly top secret sources allows us to bring new historical voices to the fore, on the other hand, such cases underline the dual role of

³⁹ Ibid, pp. 148-150. This included the Secretary of State for the Colonies, the Foreign Office, the Lord Chancellor’s Advisory Council on National Records and Archives, and the National Archives.

⁴⁰ Elkins, ‘Archives, Intelligence, and Secrecy’, p. 265.

⁴¹ Anderson, ‘Guilty Secrets: Deceit, Denial, and Discovery of Kenya’s ‘Migrated Archive’’, p. 144.

⁴² Richard Drayton, ‘Where Does the World Historian Write From? Objectivity, Moral Conscience, and the Past and Present of Imperialism’, *Journal of Contemporary History*, 46:3 (2011), pp. 672.

⁴³ Ibid, p. 273.

the archive in 'providing the means for certain forms of obfuscation' when it comes to information control.⁴⁴ The result is ultimately 'wilful and conscious exclusions of other forms of knowing' that defined the end of empire for decades.⁴⁵

This form of information control is well-rooted elsewhere in the British government's history. As Aldrich has demonstrated, Whitehall resorted to a variety of methods in order to protect its 'empire of secrecy'. He points to the concealment of the Ultra code-breaking success during the Second World War as evidence of the British government's carefully orchestrated management of its own history. As he notes, 'large areas of the past would have to be controlled if important secret methods were to be protected, and embarrassments avoided'. This was by no means confined to the earlier half of the twentieth century either; despite the so-called 'Glasnost' era in the 1990s, in which London relaxed its grip over archival records, releasing a considerable quantity of intelligence archives into the public domain, this too was also a 'more sophisticated programme of information management'. Thus, through carefully managing the declassification process, the British government was 'able to influence the agenda for archive-based researchers of secret service'.⁴⁶

In this regard, Aldrich also argues that the problem of scale is one that affects the contemporary intelligence historian. Whilst Whitehall is known to select around two per cent of its records for permanent preservation – a large proportion by most standards – Aldrich argues that a degree of disregard, or even un-inquisitiveness, has beset the majority of historians, in that the large proportion of documents released distracts from wider problems of record selection and destruction. In this way, most records 'head towards the incinerators unseen and largely uncontested'. The result is what he labels the ultimate influence of the 'hidden hand' – the 'prevailing distortion is the result of omission' of archival records.⁴⁷

The issue of scale is thrown into relief by a comparison with the US national archives. Here, between five and ten per cent of material is retained. In 2005, the FBI released 270 million pages of

⁴⁴ Elkins, 'Archives, Intelligence, and Secrecy', p. 265.

⁴⁵ Ibid, p. 273.

⁴⁶ Aldrich, *The Hidden Hand*, p. 6; see also Richard J. Aldrich, 'Policing the Past: Official History, Secrecy and British Intelligence since 1945', *English Historical Review*, 119:483 (September 2004): pp. 922-53.

⁴⁷ Ibid, p. 8.

records without review in an attempt to clear its backlog. But the volume is so great that there are significant delays to declassification - fifty million pages of FBI material remained unprocessed because they required inspection by 'weeder's'. Other materials lie in a strange historical no-mans-land between openness and secrecy, waiting to be accessioned into the archives. Moreover, once they are released, they are hard to use because they are poorly catalogued. The uncomfortable fact is that preserving more records sometimes make them less accessible.⁴⁸

From a methodological perspective, this therefore brings to light major issues that relate to reliance upon archival material. Just as in the case of the 'lost' Foreign Office records rediscovered at Hanslope Park, the incomplete nature of other records relating to the intelligence services raises questions as to the efficacy of such research. In his comprehensive history of the SOE, Murphy, for example, draws attention to the extensive loss of SOE records. Owing to a combination of record destruction, (including a fire at the Baker Street office in 1946) and questionable weeding processes that resulted in 'wholesale and indiscriminate' file destruction (once SOE files were inherited by the SIS), Murphy notes that at least eighty-seven per cent of SOE's papers had been destroyed.⁴⁹ Most of the files that survived are London files - few papers reflect the fact that SOE was a global organisation with many regional archives and headquarters. Moreover, 137 files on SOE remain to be opened in the National Archives as they are closed under Section 3.4 of the Public Records Act, which essentially gives power to departments to retain documents on the grounds of sensitive information contained therein. Therefore, as Murphy notes, the key question for researchers is 'just how useful any work that relies on what remains can be'.⁵⁰

⁴⁸ Scott Shane, 'U.S. to Declassify Secrets at Age 25', *New York Times*, 21st December 2006. Available at

http://www.nytimes.com/2006/12/21/washington/21declassify.html?pagewanted=print&_r=0.

⁴⁹ Christopher J. Murphy, *Security and Special Operations: SOE and MI5 during the Second World War*, (Basingstoke, 2006), p. 214.

⁵⁰ Ibid. Murphy notes that this was not confined to SOE either. MI5 experienced a similar process; former Director-General Stephen Lander noted that in MI5 archival records, 'there is rather less material than might have been expected', pointing to wartime bomb damage from the German Luftwaffe in 1940 in the Wormwood Scrubs facilities, and an 'inconsistent approach to file destruction'. Subsequently, after consultations with historians, MI5 then destroyed some 90% of its archive in the 1990s, accepting that the TNA could not store its vast volume of Cold War files.

In addition to access to records, the content of the documents themselves poses a core problem for researchers. Not only are intelligence documents subject to content redaction, such as names, personal information, or information pertaining to national security, but the very nature of intelligence adds additional complications to ascertaining content. Asserting that ‘deception, deceit, and manipulation’ are central elements of intelligence practice, Hughes, Jackson, and Scott ask the implications that this has for the historical record.⁵¹ Pointing out that such difficulties have weighed into the decision of many historians to ‘ignore intelligence’ as a factor in international politics, they argue that not only do intelligence documents ‘not speak for themselves, some may also dissemble, and some may even lie’.⁵²

Overcoming Archival Obstacles

Nevertheless, archival releases can yield significant information. Despite the numerous obstacles to archival research discussed, if subjected to focused academic analysis, intelligence records are still ‘able to turn up secrets’, or at least traces of them.⁵³ As Walton argues, the discovery of intelligence failures is a case in point; the disclosure of failures suggests that selectivity of the archive by government is not always possible without officials revealing their hand, and this prevents a one-sided, optimistic picture of intelligence history from emerging.⁵⁴ Moreover, as this section explains, the fragmentary nature of intelligence records are such that to some extent, they concede certain loopholes to the archival researcher, enabling the construction of the historical record through less conventional means. In other words, the archival detritus left by government is simply too complex for the history police to contain all its secrets and prevent some of them from spilling into the public domain.

This latter conception dominates the approach to archival research taken in this thesis.

Moreover, this thesis goes further and asserts that we do not need to know everything in order to know

⁵¹ Hughes, Jackson, Scott, *Exploring Intelligence Archives*, p. 3.

⁵² Ibid.

⁵³ Ibid, p. 8.

⁵⁴ Walton, *Empire of Secrets*, p. 353.

enough. Metaphorically, if our question is about the skin of a crocodile we do not need to see or touch the whole beast to know that it is covered in scales – a brief contact with the tip of its tail may be enough. After all, historians of earlier periods have had to content themselves with limited evidence. In short, this thesis takes a position of both ontological and epistemological optimism. The history of secret service is a measurable entity - there is enough data to make some confident assertions about it, despite the efforts of the counterintelligence state to deny historians and political scientists knowledge.⁵⁵

This conception characterises the thesis's approach to archival research. It contends that intelligence and security agencies are now so large, and their records so voluminous, that they are impossible to hide or keep entirely secure. James Bamford deployed this approach when researching his famous book on the US National Security Agency, *The Puzzle Palace*.⁵⁶ Duncan Campbell and Peter Laurie adopted this approach in the UK when researching the security state. As Aldrich has argued, this methodology begins with the idea there are 'no secrets, only lazy researchers'.⁵⁷ Whilst this is an overstatement, this does point to significant areas in which historians need a greater degree of introspection. As discussed in the introduction, this thesis will examine the activities of the British SIS in Hong Kong, Beijing, and Hanoi. Not only do these three cases remain unexplored in SIS's history, but they are also cases in which, through a combination of archival records and oral history, it is possible to piece together a different dimension of British intelligence history because of the intermingling of diplomatic and intelligence records and functions at these particular posts. These cases allow attention to both the granular details of everyday intelligence activity, as well as the higher-level institutional context that gave meaning to such intelligence.

This thesis will draw upon a key method of archival research which numerous other intelligence historians have deployed – that of 'archival intelligence hacking'.⁵⁸ This approach was

⁵⁵ By contrast Peter Jackson, longstanding editor of *Intelligence and National Security* describes himself as an ontological optimist and an epistemological pessimist. Remarks at Gregynog CISS conference, May 2013.

⁵⁶ Paul Constance, 'How Jim Bamford Probed the NSA', *Cryptologia*, 21:1 (1997), pp. 71-74.

⁵⁷ Aldrich, *GCHQ*, pp. 361-2.

⁵⁸ R.J. Aldrich, "The Secret State," in Paul Addison and Harriet Jones, (eds.), *A Companion to Contemporary Britain*, (Oxford, 2005), p. 336.

pioneered by the three ‘lone gunmen’ of the UK National Archives: Bradley Smith, David Stafford and Julian Lewis.⁵⁹ In the late 1970s, these three researchers set out to work on topics such as SOE or the Joint Intelligence Committee, at a time when their core records were still classified. They realised that both organisations cooperated widely with other government bodies; the ubiquitous use of carbon paper therefore meant that many copies of ‘closed’ documents were available in the mundane files of other departments - or even those of allied countries - to which they had been circulated. Typically, Lewis discovered highly classified material from cabinet committees on intelligence and chemical weapons in the files of Combined Operations Headquarters, which dealt mostly with landing craft and beach gradients.⁶⁰ David Stafford and Bradley Smith both uncovered vast quantities of SOE material in the late 1970s, some twenty years before the SOE archive was finally realised into the archives by SIS.⁶¹

The most remarkable body of overlooked material was the archive of the India Office, the London department responsible for liaising with the Viceroy and the Government of India in Delhi. During the 1947 negotiations for the transfer of power, Nehru insisted that the newly independent state inherit not only the files generated in Delhi but also those in the archive of the India Office in London. This issue became a sticking point in the negotiations and the compromise was that the papers remained in London, but were never to be integrated into the main UK National Archives. Instead, they were housed at their own building in Blackfriars, and not subjected to the sorts of weeding and selective retention on security grounds that were applied to other files. Thousands of files had slipped through the net.⁶²

This method that relies upon exploiting the records of other governmental departments has been gaining ground since the 1980s. A central tenet of this thesis is that intelligence collection is not

⁵⁹ R. Shearman, *Wanting to Believe: A Critical Guide to The X-Files, Millennium and The Lone Gunmen*, (New York, 2009).

⁶⁰ Julian Lewis, *Changing Direction: British Military Planning for Post-War Strategic Defence, 1942-47*, (London, 2004).

⁶¹ David Stafford, *Britain and European Resistance, 1940-1945: a Survey of the Special Operations Executive, With Documents*, (London, 1980); Bradley F. Smith, *The Shadow Warriors: OSS and the Origins of the CIA*, (New York, 1983).

⁶² See for example A. Farrington, *Guide to the records of the India Office Military Department, 10R L/MIL & L/WS*. (London, 1982).

solely the remit of the intelligence services - in accordance with Michael Herman's conception of intelligence as a 'layer cake', intelligence was also gathered under the auspices of the Foreign Office.⁶³ This method is especially suitable to the subject investigated here, since one of the central arguments in the thesis turns on the role of the dual intelligence officer-diplomat. In practical terms, this means that the records of other departments are of greater methodological importance because they provide not only important data, but better context.

This highlights the utility of bureaucratic overlap and liaison to the historian; despite SIS's lack of official records, intelligence officers posted to consular outposts emerge clearly in Foreign Office files. As Walton points out, given that the purpose of the intelligence agencies is to service other departments, it is 'only natural' that their records should be found amongst those of other departments. In his study of British intelligence and decolonisation, Walton therefore sought to combine intelligence records with those of other departments.⁶⁴ This 'outside-looking-in' approach is a longstanding - and fruitful - technique for intelligence historians; Murphy, for example, drew upon records belonging to the War Office, Air Ministry, and Prime Minister's Office for his history of the SOE, noting that the records of certain departments (such as the Cabinet Office) tended to have a 'higher survival rate' than others.⁶⁵ As Andrew and Dilks have emphasised, this method enables the intelligence historian to fill in 'both the general outline of the missing intelligence dimension and much of its operational detail'.⁶⁶

Accordingly, this thesis has sought to circumvent such restrictions imposed by the archival record. Involving both British and foreign archives, document duplication has been most useful in revealing information otherwise meant to be kept classified. As Murphy has highlighted, similar files, despite containing the same material, can be vetted differently, since each department controls its own records and implements general guidelines differently. In his case, whilst the name of a particular SOE officer was 'diligently redacted' from SOE's Western Europe files, unedited versions of the

⁶³ Michael Herman, 'Intelligence and Policy: A Comment', *Intelligence and National Security*, 6:1 (1991), p. 233.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 354.

⁶⁵ Murphy, *SOE and MI5 during the Second World War*, pp. 216-217.

⁶⁶ Andrew and Dilks in Moran, 'Coming to Clarity', p. 50.

same papers in MI5 files revealed the officer's identity.⁶⁷ Bureaucratic rivalry also has its advantages for the archival researcher. As Hughes, Jackson, and Scott have discussed, 'the interlocking nature of modern government' is a useful tool for the intelligence historian. They assert that 'internecine quarrels' are of particular use for the historian, as they give incentive to officials to record things in written form, whether to protect themselves, their department, or with eye to the future historical record.⁶⁸ As such, where possible, this thesis will draw upon Foreign and Colonial Office files, records from the Prime Minister's Office, the Ministry of Defence, and the Cabinet Office, the latter which holds correspondence and reports by the Joint Intelligence Committee.

This thesis has sought to enhance this methodical approach. A key problem of the 'archival intelligence hacking' approach developed by Smith, Stafford and Lewis is the sheer time taken to survey the files. The more mundane or obscure the file, the more likely it is to be overlooked by the weeder; this, combined with the potential relevance of all the file content, leads to the logical outcome that all the files need to be surveyed – a recipe for overload. It is worth noting that technology has begun to offer a solution; private companies have begun to scan large batches of UK government files, making them commercially available to universities, in the form of data bases that can be searched with optical character readers. Suddenly, it is possible to search all the Foreign Office files for China over several decades for the word 'sigint'. Bizarrely, however, this has meant travelling to the Library of Congress to access an expensive database of files that are available in hard copy in London. Thus, the initial groundwork for archival research can be condensed into a matter of hours, and material overlooked by government weeders quickly uncovered.⁶⁹

The cases of Hong Kong, Beijing, and Hanoi are especially of methodological interest, because they open up the possibility of augmenting the written record with oral history. Importantly, the archival files have enabled the tracing of SIS officers posted to these respective outposts. Despite the fact that few of the intelligence officers mentioned in this study are alive in the present day, where possible, this thesis has sought to combine archival research with unstructured interviews with

⁶⁷ Ibid, p. 217.

⁶⁸ Hughes, Jackson, Scott, *Exploring Intelligence Archives*, p. 8.

⁶⁹ The Adam Matthew Digital electronic database of Foreign Office Files for China, 1919-1980, has been notably valuable.

surviving intelligence officers, although this has confined the amount of interviews conducted to a small number. By contrast with American records, which are often subject to a shorter classification review period, the longer release period for MI5 or SIS-related records permits less time for researchers to contact retired officers, leaving the laundered archival record to stand alone, unchallenged by oral testimony. Given the more technical nature of certain intelligence activities, it is possible that the full meaning of some of these documents will not necessarily be self-evident to future historians.

However, interviews too pose their own set of challenges for the intelligence historian and for the social scientists.⁷⁰ When utilised as a supplement to the archival record, as Davies notes, interviews can ‘enrich and interpret the arcane and often vaguely worded’ document,⁷¹ and when employed effectively, can enable the interview to go *beyond* usual boundaries, in encouraging the interviewee to reflect upon their own actions. In this way, memory is treated as more than simply a ‘passive repository of facts’, but rather an active process that continues to evolve.⁷² Nonetheless, oral history remains beset by numerous issues relating to information reliability, acknowledged by numerous intelligence historians. Firstly, memory is subject to its own distortions, carrying with it the risk of being ‘faulty and unreliable, prone to the crustaceans of time’.⁷³ Furthermore, in terms of interpretation by the researcher, this translates into the issue that the historian is effectively assessing the respondents’ own perceptions and sensibilities, rather than the factual accuracy of those perceptions. In this regard, Davies observes that their epistemological status is more akin to a memoir.⁷⁴ Secondly, oral history is affected by the very nature of intelligence itself. The element of secrecy and subversion associated with intelligence exacerbates the existing challenges the memory poses. Moran asserts that pertaining to a ‘subject worked in secrecy’, such testimony is often ‘polluted by what has been absorbed from subsequent experience and discourse’. Moreover, this is particularly

⁷⁰ Hilary Arksey and Peter Knight, *Interviewing for Social Scientists: An Introductory Resource with Examples*, (London, 1999), p.1; Lewis Anthony Dexter, *Elite and Specialized Interviewing*, (Evanston, IL, 1970), p.5.

⁷¹ Philip H.J. Davies, ‘Spies as Informants: Triangulation and the Interpretation of Elite Interview Data in the Study of Intelligence and Security Services’, *Politics*, 21:1 (2001), p. 74.

⁷² Hammond, ‘Through a Glass, Darkly: The CIA and Oral History’, p. 325.

⁷³ *Ibid*, p. 322.

⁷⁴ Davies, ‘Spies as Informants’, p. 77.

so for those considered ‘once powerful, corrupted by a self-conscious desire to entomb a good reputation’.⁷⁵ This takes on a somewhat darker tone when taking into account that former intelligence officers were once trained to mislead, deceive, and hide – as Hammond observes, such interviewees are ‘just as likely to subvert the historical record as anything else’.⁷⁶

As such, this thesis has also seized upon existing oral history transcripts, the memoirs of former officers, or reflections published privately. This has been most valuable in yielding information that would most certainly not have been revealed through official records and which was not available to the researcher due to the death of key subjects. Moreover, memoirs in particular tend to have greater evidential stability than say, oral history methods. Davies, for example, recognises memoirs as a ‘published artefact’, and therefore less volatile over time.⁷⁷ Memoirs are nevertheless subject to a strong degree of subjectivity, and even if not especially partisan, tend to capture what the actor thought interesting or important about their past in retrospect. This is conceded by Percy Cradock, one of the officials stationed at the British outpost in Beijing, and a key figure in one of the case study chapters. Reflecting upon his own memoirs on China, he notes that, ‘we each construct our vision of China from the limited materials available to us, from our experience and reading, our memories of certain conversations and scenes, and we cling tenaciously to it’.⁷⁸ Indeed, he goes on to characterise the genre as ‘an elitist history...of puzzled or frustrated Western emissaries under close surveillance’, conditioned by their circumstances.⁷⁹ Diaries, in some ways, are more useful than memoirs, since they capture thoughts at the time, but few intelligence officers kept them for security reasons. Lastly, in some instances, email correspondence with former intelligence officers who have served in later time periods, but in similar stations, have provided valuable insight that the archival record was unable to produce.

All the above sources have, however, been treated with caution; in a few instances, information derived from interviews has clashed with memoir material, requiring a thorough approach

⁷⁵ Moran, ‘Coming to Clarity’, p. 44.

⁷⁶ Hammond, ‘Through a Glass, Darkly: The CIA and Oral History’, p. 323.

⁷⁷ Davies, ‘Spies as Informants’, p. 77.

⁷⁸ Percy Cradock, *Experiences of China*, (London, 1994), p. 2.

⁷⁹ *Ibid*, p. 3.

to establishing the consistency and reliability of the information at hand. This is in part where the written record has proved its primacy; Walton concurs, arguing that it is ‘better to attach weight to written records’, not only when their authors never thought they would be declassified, but also because of the malleability of memory, noting that it is ‘easily capable of playing tricks’.⁸⁰ Crucially, it is also where the triangulation of data has proved the best solution, in terms of cross-referencing both between and within data collected, as advocated by Davies.⁸¹ To a certain degree, this actually took place *during* the process of data collection; in two instances, the author was able to present to an interviewee – one of the former SIS officers stationed in Asia, and a key figure across all three case studies – documents they had written whilst in post. This was a vital tool not only in establishing a more intimate relationship with the interviewee, but in stimulating their own reflections and in some ways, their own assessments of their intelligence duties whilst in post – a truly unique experience.

Furthermore, with regard to the transatlantic dimension of the ‘Special Intelligence Relationship’ between the UK and US, this thesis has also striven to make use of foreign archival records. In order to achieve a fuller, more complete picture of intelligence exchange and liaison between the two countries in the aforementioned stations, this thesis has drawn upon records from the US National Archives, the CREST database containing CIA records, and the Johnson Presidential Library in Austin, Texas. Hughes, Jackson, and Scott endorse this ‘multi-national approach’ to studying the intelligence-related aspects of state behaviour, noting that whilst governments can exert some means of control over their own historical records, ‘they have little or no control over declassification and destruction procedures in other countries’.⁸² Historians often underline the ‘profusion’ of British intelligence materials available in American archives, supposedly since the 1970s at least, one particular instance of captured CIA records being those of the Shanghai Municipal Police, for example - which was in fact an extensive British-run security agency.⁸³

The American and British authorities have held ‘history police’ conferences to achieve joint lists of records that should remain closed, seeking to protect each other’s secrets. Moran points to files

⁸⁰ Walton, *Empire of Secrets*, p. 354.

⁸¹ Davies, ‘Spies as Informants’, p. 78.

⁸² Hughes, Jackson, Scott, *Exploring Intelligence Archives*, p. 8.

⁸³ F. Wakeman, ‘Policing Modern Shanghai’, *The China Quarterly*, 115:1 (1988), pp.408-440.

where British attachments are missing from US archival records, and thus more sensitive of British considerations.⁸⁴ Nevertheless, the sheer scale of American archives often defeats these efforts at hiding documents. In the American instance, document duplication has been most revealing. Comparing British and American archival holdings of the same file has allowed the thesis to practically reconstruct whole documents in rare instances, or to locate documents missing from the UK National Archives in American archives, owing to differences in national policies concerning document redaction. Moreover, in the case of the Hanoi chapter in particular, using such complementary archival records has allowed the thesis to trace the journey of British intelligence documents across the Atlantic, to its specific recipients in the US. This affirms the utility of a comparative approach; as Hughes, Jackson, and Scott argue, comparing and contrasting intelligence records of different states can ‘therefore provide new perspectives on both intelligence practices’.⁸⁵

It is also worth noting that several records relating to each of the three case studies still remain classified at the UK National Archives, whilst others were destroyed upon review in the early 2000s. Although the grounds for such policies may never be anything more than a reduction in the volume of records, it adds the caveat that certain questions will not be able to be fully answered by this thesis. This raises the inevitable question - and what Aldrich labels an ‘elementary rule’ of historians’ work – constantly asking what is *not* present in the archive. The destruction of documents is not confined to the managers of archives either; as will be shown in the Beijing chapter in particular, the hostile security environment in which SIS officers operated had consequences for the records each diplomatic outpost was able to retain, leading to some forms of panicked document destruction. In numerous instances, upon hearing of an impending attack or threat, or even extreme ‘spy phobia’ in some cases, the officers undertook extensive file destruction on the spot, burning documents in makeshift incinerators made from oil barrels or bins. However, in a few cases, index sheets of the documents destroyed have detailed what exactly was destroyed, which in itself yields some insight to the

⁸⁴ Moran, ‘Coming to Clarity’.

⁸⁵ Hughes, Jackson, Scott, *Exploring Intelligence Archives*, p. 8.

researcher. As Murphy states, though ‘undeniably frustrating’, these are still an indication of previous content, and better than nothing at all.⁸⁶

In conclusion, although the archival process remains a flawed tool for the intelligence historian, it can nonetheless lead to valuable discoveries. Its caveats are clear: relying upon the archive for primary material raises issues of subjectivity, reliability, and most palpably, issues of access for the researcher. In addition, there are the challenges of using intelligence material itself, known to be plagued by secrecy, omission, and even deception, given the tradecraft of its authors. These aspects are not insurmountable, however. Adopting a more wholesome approach to archival research, by combining it with interviews, transcripts, memoirs, secondary literature, and even the material of foreign archives, allows for avoiding obvious pitfalls when working with material that is in many ways, hostage to its own secret nature.

Epistemological optimism then, reinforced with the exciting new tools of electronic research, must nevertheless be tempered by due caution. In 1987, Christopher Andrew, the doyen of intelligence historians, offered a stern methodological warning. He explained that, in studying the sources for British foreign policy, there must be constant caution in dealing with what is, in essence, a ‘laundered archive’, despite the intentions of ‘honourable men’ acting in what ‘they believed is the national interest’. What follows is an attempt to defeat the diligent cleansing operatives and scrubbers of the government archive – worthy opponents - in order to uncover a story that many in government wished might not ever be told.⁸⁷

⁸⁶ Murphy, *SOE and MI5 during the Second World War*, p. 217.

⁸⁷ C.M. Andrew, ‘Secret Intelligence and Foreign Policy 1900-1939’, in C.M. Andrew and J. Noakes (eds.) *Intelligence and International Relations 1900-1945*, (Exeter, 1987), p.9.

Literature Review

Introduction

Intelligence is by nature an obscure, yet dynamic concept. As the introductory chapter has explained, the epistemological roots of the study of this subject in governmental records and archival research renders it somewhat of a polemic for scholars. In the methodological section, it will be suggested that the multifarious relationship between government, archive, and researcher has generated an array of scholarly debates, illustrating the complexity of intelligence history as a field some three decades after its foundation in the early 1980s.¹ Moreover, owing to its intersection with other substantial subject areas such as foreign policy, diplomacy, and certain types of warfare, intelligence has drawn interjections not only from intelligence historians, but also from international historians, and practitioners, eager to apply their career experiences and to extract lessons learned, together with political scientists and even investigative journalists. The field of intelligence studies is now substantial in size; with its own journals, specialist conferences and university degrees, the attendant volume of publication is considerable.² This chapter will draw upon three distinct areas of intelligence history literature in order to contextualise the broader arguments raised across the thesis, as well as to provide a framework for its contribution to knowledge.

Firstly, it will examine a most basic – yet vital – debate that engages any scholar seeking to study intelligence. It will examine what intelligence *is* as a concept, exploring its multifaceted nature,

¹ The publication of a ‘manifesto’ about the missing dimension by Andrew and Dilks in July 1984 is often taken as the starting point.

² The busy intersection of disciplines and trades is most visible at the Intelligence Studies Section of the International Studies Association which now fields some eighty panels a year.

the different ways in which scholars categorise or organise intelligence, and the implications of the definitional ambiguity of intelligence. Doing so will enable this thesis to define intelligence as it pertains to the three case study chapters, ultimately positioning itself alongside scholars who regard intelligence as a spectrum, in which ‘information’, though not gathered using clandestine methods, nonetheless contributes to intelligence assessment. It will also contextualise one of the arguments common to all the case studies, which is the notion that intelligence officers stationed in consular posts were able to use their dual role to collect both secret and non-secret intelligence.

Secondly, in order to lend context to the broader international relations framework used by this thesis, this chapter will explore scholarly debate concerning the ‘Special Relationship’ between Britain and the United States during the Cold War. Drawing upon various schools of thought provoked through one of the most vigorous and prolific research areas of the last few years (including in the fields of diplomatic history and intelligence history), this section will explore the degree of proximity between the two allies. It will traverse across different ‘waves’ of argument, ranging from more orthodox understandings of the special relationship, to revisionist notions of ‘transatlantic antagonism’, and even rivalry between the two allies. It will also explore realist, idealist and liberal institutionalist interpretations of possible alliance drives. Doing so will ultimately serve to frame this thesis’s broader argument that British intelligence allowed Britain to punch above its weight as the weaker, junior power in an asymmetric relationship.

Lastly, this chapter will sketch out the existing literature on British intelligence in Asia. As will be shown, although several key intelligence historians have produced seminal pieces on British intelligence, including excellent research on the Special Operations Executive (SOE), military intelligence, and signals intelligence, research focusing specifically on the Secret Intelligence Service (SIS) in Asia remains limited. This is particularly true for the Cold War period, which in comparison with the two world wars, and the interwar period, remains an impoverished area of study. Examining this literature will therefore allow the thesis to identify important gaps in the existing literature, and to position itself in relation to these gaps. In doing so, it will make its contribution to knowledge, though its application of British intelligence history to the special relationship.

Definitional debate – what is intelligence?

The inherent degree of secrecy that characterises intelligence raises a fundamental problem for the scholar – that of defining ‘intelligence’ as a concept. The secret nature of intelligence activities, whether with regard to source, methods, purpose, or institutions, has given rise to a panoply of definitions, ranging from more simplistic notions of ‘information’, to covert activity, secrecy, and even national strategic culture. It is made more difficult by the preponderance of fictional references to intelligence and the extent to which even practitioners reference this material in the course of their policy work.³

Definitions in this area are therefore highly problematic. Captured in Gill and Phythian’s description of intelligence as an ‘elusive’ concept,⁴ it raises the issue of whether intelligence as a term has become too diluted. The implications of this are substantial for writing intelligence history; various scholars have argued that its incoherence as a term remains a key obstacle to developing a theory of intelligence.⁵ Intelligence was once considered under-theorised, but that has changed in recent years with much effort being devoted to issues of perception and ethics. Nevertheless, the subject remains rather hazy, and certainly the wider connection to international relations theory remains underdeveloped.⁶

Herman, in stating that intelligence ‘by definition resists scholarship’, argues that intelligence’s incoherence in definitional terms splits its researchers in two fields: those in the minority, who are able to conduct intelligence studies ‘on the inside’, and those ‘on the outside’,

³ S. Keslowitz, ‘Simpsons, 24, and the Law: How Homer Simpson and Jack Bauer Influence Congressional Lawmaking and Judicial Reasoning’, *Cardozo Law Review*, 29:2878, (2007); Keren Tenenboim-Weinblatt, ‘Where is Jack Bauer When You Need Him?: The Uses of Television Drama in Mediated Political Discourse’, *Political Communication* 26:4 (2009), pp. 367-387; A. Zegart, ‘Spytainment: the Real Influence of Fake Spies’, *International Journal of Intelligence and CounterIntelligence*, 23:4 (2010), pp. 599-622.

⁴ Peter Gill and Mark Phythian, *Intelligence in an Insecure World*, (Cambridge, 2006), p. 1.

⁵ E.g. Michael Warner, ‘Wanted: A Definition of ‘Intelligence’,’ *Studies in Intelligence* 46:3 (2002): 15–22; Walter Laqueur, *World of Secrets: The Uses and Limits of Intelligence*, (New Brunswick, 1993).

⁶ Christopher M. Andrew, ‘Intelligence, International Relations and ‘Under-Theorisation’,’ *Intelligence and National Security*, 19:2 (2004), pp.170–184; Peter Gill, Stephen Marrin, Mark, Phythian, (eds.) *Intelligence Theory: Key Questions and Debates* (New York, 2008).

without official access to original records.⁷ His point about official records resonates with this thesis and so this section will examine three related aspects of the ‘what is intelligence?’ debate, including how intelligence is organised by scholars, secrecy, and the notion of intelligence as information.

Before delving into specific definitions, it is worth briefly examining the way in which intelligence has been organised definitionally by scholars. In a key article critically examining definitions of intelligence, Warner examines Cold War definitions, relating particularly to an American context, in which he considers military, practitioner, and academic assertions of what intelligence is, or should be. In attempting to make sense of the wide range of definitions collected, he divides these down along the lines of source, and clarity of the definition: he suggests that intelligence is an agency, a process, and end-product, ‘both an activity and a product of that activity’.⁸ Similarly, Johnson identifies four categories through which intelligence can be understood: as a product, process, mission, or organisation, pointing to strategic intelligence, tactical intelligence, geographical threats, intelligence in a mission sense, as an institution, and to the intelligence cycle, to name but a few manifestations.⁹

By contrast, and representative of the more recent literature to emerge in the past ten years, Gill and Phythian define intelligence according to its purpose, in terms of covert action, investigations, advice to policymakers, and countering threats. They conclude that intelligence is ultimately an umbrella term that encompasses all of the above (secrecy, information, the intelligence cycle, counterintelligence, strategic threats, and covert action).¹⁰ However, it is important to note that these understandings are very much representative of the Anglosphere; although scholars have devoted attention to differentiating between British and American conceptions of intelligence,¹¹ their

⁷ Michael Herman, ‘Sources and Methods for the Study of Intelligence’, in Loch K. Johnson (eds.), *Handbook of Intelligence Studies*, (Abingdon, 2007), pp. 17-28.

⁸ Warner, ‘Wanted: A Definition of Intelligence’, pp. 15-22. In this he follows the arguments made by Mark Lowenthal that intelligence can be an organisation, an activity or an informational product.

⁹ Loch K. Johnson, ‘Introduction’, in Loch K. Johnson (eds.), *Handbook of Intelligence Studies*, (Abingdon, 2007), p. 1.

¹⁰ Gill and Phythian, *Intelligence in an Insecure World*, pp. 2-17. Roy Godson’s early work also took a functional approach, which he called ‘elements’ of intelligence, see R. Godson, *Intelligence requirements for the 1980’s* (Washington, 1979).

¹¹ For an excellent discussion of the contrast between British and American intelligence cultures, see Philip Davies, ‘Divergent National Concepts’, ‘Ideas of Intelligence: Divergent National Concepts and Institutions’, *Harvard International Review*, 24:3 (2002), pp. 62-66.

understandings remain notably narrow compared to other geographical areas, such as the European Union, or the global South. In the latter regard, the most recent literature delineates the manner in which intelligence in non-democratic states is often associated with internal security and regime protection, usually serving as an enforcing tool for the leadership.¹²

A common strand to the above approaches to intelligence, and with intelligence definitions in general, is the notion of secrecy. Often referred to as the ‘missing dimension’ of history,¹³ numerous scholars converge on secrecy as a defining characteristic of intelligence. Referring to it as the missing ingredient in intelligence definitions, Warner, for example, defines intelligence as ‘secret, state activity to understand or influence foreign entities’.¹⁴ Both he and Johnson draw upon the work of Shulsky, who places heavy emphasis upon secrecy in asserting that what distinguishes intelligence from other intellectual activities is ‘the connection between intelligence and secrecy’. Shulsky also applies this to a counterintelligence context, pointing to the need for secrecy within intelligence activity and intelligence organisations, stating that intelligence often entails access to ‘information some other party is trying to deny’.¹⁵ Ken Robertson captures this succinctly, suggesting that intelligence is about other people’s secrets stolen secretly; he emphasises that the value of the theft is increased if the victim does not realise that their information is compromised.¹⁶ This is echoed in Johnson’s understanding of intelligence, who, in his discussion of intelligence, underlines the role of

¹² P. Davies and K.C. Gustafson (eds.), *Intelligence Elsewhere Spies and Espionage Outside the Anglosphere* (Washington DC, 2013); Richard Aldrich and John Kasuku, ‘Escaping from American Intelligence: Culture, Ethnocentrism, and the Anglosphere’, *International Affairs*, 88:5 (2012), pp. 1009-1028. They also lend discussion to intelligence cultures in China, and South Africa. For other examples of intelligence outside of the Anglosphere, see: Zakia Shiraz, ‘Drugs and Dirty Wars: Intelligence Cooperation in the Global South’, *Third World Quarterly*, 34:10 (2013), pp. 1749-1766; John M. Nomikos, ‘A European Union Intelligence Service for Confronting Terrorism’, *International Journal of Intelligence and Counterintelligence*, 18:2 (2005), pp. 191-203; James I. Walsh, ‘Intelligence Sharing in the European Union: Institutions are Not Enough’, *Journal of Common Market Studies*, 44:3 (2006), pp. 625-643.

¹³ Christopher Andrew and David Dilks, *The Missing Dimension: Governments and Intelligence Communities in the Twentieth Century*, (Urbana, 1984).

¹⁴ Warner, ‘Wanted: A Definition of Intelligence’, p. 21.

¹⁵ Ibid, p. 19; Johnson, ‘Introduction’, pp. 3-4.

¹⁶ Ken G. Robertson, ‘Intelligence, Terrorism and Civil Liberties’, *Conflict Quarterly* 7:2 (1987) p. 46.

access to information that other nations try to keep hidden. In this sense, intelligence has a secret component, which thus renders it ‘intelligence’, rather than simply information.¹⁷

However, it is important to observe that Andrew’s reference to the ‘missing dimension’ of history was over thirty years ago. With this in mind, can intelligence still be considered in this way? Perhaps the answer is to be found in the element of surprise the archive is still able to unearth for contemporary historians. Anderson’s discovery of the ‘migrated archive’ is perhaps the most prominent, recent example of the complex interaction between intelligence, official history and the archive. As part of a landmark legal case involving victims of the British campaign against the Mau Mau insurgency, Anderson and his team stumbled upon 8,800 legacy files relating to abuses carried out by British officials during their counterinsurgency campaign.¹⁸ Given that these files were previously believed to have been removed or destroyed at Kenyan independence, their discovery revitalised debate amongst scholars as to the process involved in keeping these files withdrawn (or hidden) from the clutches of the archive – essentially pointing to the role of secrecy in writing official historical narratives.¹⁹ With this in mind, using secrecy as a lens through which to examine intelligence is useful for three key reasons: firstly, it provides for a much narrower definition of intelligence, and secondly, it converges with numerous areas of intelligence history, allowing for an excellent overview of the literature. Lastly, focusing on the split between the overt and covert aspects of intelligence is a crucial debate that will help to frame the definition adopted in line with the case studies of this thesis.

¹⁷ Johnson, ‘Introduction’, pp. 3-4.

¹⁸ David M. Anderson, ‘Mau Mau in the High Court and the ‘Lost’ British Empire Archives: Colonial Conspiracy or Bureaucratic Bungle’, *The Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History*, 39:5 (2011), pp. 699-716.

¹⁹ For example, see Calder Walton, *Empire of Secrets: British Intelligence, the Cold War, and the Twilight of Empire*, (London, 2013); Anthony Badger, ‘Historians, A Legacy of Suspicion and the ‘Migrated Archives’’, *Small Wars and Insurgencies*, 23:4-5 (2012), pp. 799-807; Gregory Rawlings, ‘Lost Files, Forgotten Papers and Colonial Disclosures: The ‘Migrated Archives’ and the Pacific, 1963-2013’, *The Journal of Pacific History*, 50:2 (2015), pp. 189-212; Benjamin Grob-Fitzgibbon, ‘Further Thoughts on the Imperial Endgame and Britain’s Dirty Wars’, *The Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History*, 40:3 (2012), pp. 503-514; Caroline Elkins, ‘Alchemy of Evidence: Mau Mau, the British Empire, and the High Court of Justice’, *The Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History*, 39:5 (2011), pp. 731-748.

The absence of intelligence history from the official record is another key dimension of the debate surrounding secrecy and intelligence. Discussing the relationship between government secrecy, archival policy, and the political nature of writing intelligence, Moran underlines the centrality of secrecy to intelligence, particularly in a definitional sense.²⁰ Crucially, he moves beyond the definitional debate, noting that ‘how we define intelligence has significant implications for practitioners and scholars alike’. With particular regard to secrecy, he argues that definitions can have ramifications on a practical level; definitions can shape the work and remit of oversight committees on intelligence agencies, and influence declassification policies through elucidating which activities governments are obliged to keep secret.²¹

Secret services not only report on the world, but also seek to change it by means of the ‘hidden hand’. Accordingly, several scholars have defined intelligence through its cross-over with covert action. This has often been through discussion in a national context. Stempel, for example, discusses the nexus between intelligence and covert action in the US foreign policy establishment, arguing that this forced a differentiation between intelligence and diplomacy in terms of ‘norms, objectives, and means and methods’.²² By contrast, the British aspect of the discussion centres itself around the normative dimension of the ‘secret state’. For example, in a significant and lengthy study of the British SIS, Dorril discusses the darker side of intelligence and its engagement in covert action, pointing to the wide reach of the British government through surveillance, infiltration missions, propaganda, and subversive activity, including assassination plots. Although cognisant of the fact that secrecy in its present form has very much eroded, inherent in Dorril’s piece is the secrecy surrounding SIS covert activities, especially during the Cold War, given the service’s determination to thwart Britain’s post-imperial decline after the end of the Second World War.²³ While diplomatic reportage

²⁰ Christopher Moran, ‘Coming to Clarity: The Pursuit of Intelligence History: Methods, Sources, and Trajectories in the United Kingdom’, *Studies in Intelligence*, 55:2 (2011), pp. 33-55.

²¹ *Ibid*, p 45.

²² John D. Stempel, ‘Covert Action and Diplomacy’, *International Journal of Intelligence and Counterintelligence*, 20 (2007), pp. 122-135.

²³ Stephen Dorril, *MI6: Fifty Years of Special Operations*, (London, 2000).

and intelligence collection often overlap, covert action and diplomacy are often considered to be awkward bedfellows.²⁴

Although a similar assumption is to be made in Hennessy's study, whose focus upon the institutions behind intelligence policy – namely, Whitehall and the British secret intelligence agencies – has determined his approach to intelligence as inevitably led by its secret nature, his portrayal of the secret state is much smaller, and less nefarious in its scope. Certainly, as scholars such as Aldrich have observed, this institutional approach to studying government policy and covert action often results in understandings of intelligence intertwined with secrecy. In comparison to other states, he notes that secrecy is often considered central to the British state, because the secret services are intimately 'woven into its fabric'.²⁵ As such, prolific usage of the term 'secret state' tends to be 'synonymous with shadowy intelligence and security agencies'.²⁶

However, examining intelligence through the lens of secrecy offers a rather limited and constrained consideration of what might be considered 'intelligence'. By contrast, examining the debate around intelligence as *information* offers a broader way in which to understand intelligence, particularly in terms of sources and raw gathered intelligence. An alternative set of definitions within the existing literature define intelligence as simply information; Kahn, for example, defines intelligence as something more akin to 'news', that a host of actors are able to collect, thus unconfined to intelligence officers.²⁷ Similarly, in his consideration of the different components of intelligence, Johnson highlights an understanding of intelligence as simply information, that is to say a product that is collected and analysed, 'in hopes of achieving a deeper comprehension of subversive activities at home, or political, economic, social, and military situations around the world'.²⁸ Such an understanding also pervades various institutions within the US national security establishment, underlined by the eminent CIA officer Sherman Kent, known within his field as the father of

²⁴ Stempel, 'Covert Action and Diplomacy', pp.122-124.

²⁵ Richard J. Aldrich, 'The Secret State', in Paul Addison and Harriet Jones, *A Companion to Contemporary Britain, 1939-2000*, (Blackwell, 2005), p. 339.

²⁶ Ibid, p. 333.

²⁷ David Kahn, 'An Historical Theory of Intelligence', in Peter Gill, Stephen Marrin, and Mark Phythian (eds.), *Intelligence Theory: Key Questions and Debates*, (London, 2009), p. 4.

²⁸ Johnson, 'Introduction', pp. 3-4.

intelligence analysis within the CIA, who defines intelligence as ‘knowledge’ to safeguard the national interest.²⁹ In other words, intelligence can be thought of as a particular kind of information gathered or processed to make policy or operations more effective.

Many of the scholars who conceive of intelligence in a similar way have traced the origins of intelligence to the battlefield. Kahn articulates intelligence’s core purpose as being a component of historical warfare in addition to force and will – essentially, as a force multiplier in war.³⁰ Moreover, Andrew, Aldrich, and Wark note the manner in which historically, ‘definitions of intelligence have been shaped by patterns of state development’, placing particular emphasis upon the advent of military-technical challenges to the state, which they argue prompted the emergency of sophisticated intelligence systems accompanying military advances. This is underlined in their statement that the decades after Clausewitz witnessed a ‘revolution in methods of war and diplomacy, during which intelligence would be produced on an industrial scale’.³¹ Intelligence in the Cold War was therefore primarily about warnings for ‘hot’ war, diplomatic negotiations, to verify arms control, and support local wars (such as the British government’s intelligence support to the Americans in Vietnam). Much of the information gathered during the Cold War that found itself included in intelligence reports did not come from secret sources such as human agents.

However, such definitions have come under criticism from proponents of secrecy, who emphasise secrecy as intelligence’s defining property. In discussing the manner in which different elements of the US national security establishment, such as the Brown-Aspin Commission, the Joint Chiefs of Staff, the CIA, and even the 1947 National Security Act ‘all stress the informational aspects of intelligence more than its organisational facets’.³² Warner is highly critical of this approach, which he deems to be lacking in rigour, and ‘too vague to provide real guidance’ to practitioners, thus weakening the definition to the point of being ‘incomplete’.³³ Indicative of other scholars belonging to the ‘secrecy’ school, Warner maintains that informational definitions of intelligence run the risk of

²⁹ Warner, ‘Wanted: A Definition of Intelligence’, p. 16.

³⁰ Johnson, ‘Introduction’, pp. 4-9.

³¹ Christopher M. Andrew, Richard J. Aldrich, Wesley K. Wark, *Secret Intelligence: A Reader*, (London, 2009), p. 1.

³² Warner, ‘Wanted: A Definition of Intelligence’, pp. 15-16.

³³ *Ibid*, p. 17.

over-broadening intelligence as a term; questioning whether every piece of information can be called intelligence, he concludes that the answer is ‘obviously not, because that would mean that newspapers and radio broadcast and atlases are intelligence documents, and that journalists and geographers are intelligence officers’.³⁴

Other scholars have responded to this debate by refining their definitions of intelligence according to the purpose, or audience that intelligence serves. Although Lowenthal immediately points to secrecy as a defining characteristic of intelligence, he distinguishes ‘information’ from intelligence by defining the latter according to the intelligence cycle. By centring his definition around its intended purpose for policymakers and decision-making, he arrives at the understanding that ‘intelligence is a subset of the broader category of information...all intelligence is information; not all information is intelligence’.³⁵ Laqueur adopts a similar approach to distinguishing intelligence from information, by anchoring his definition within its audience. Writing about intelligence from the point of view of its customers, i.e. policymakers, he asserts that intelligence is ‘by no means the only collector and producer of intelligence’. Instead, intelligence reaches the policymaker ‘from a great many other sources, and intelligence agencies draw their information largely from open sources’, thus, he states, they have no monopoly over ‘intelligence’ itself.³⁶

More recent attempts to add clarity to this definitional debate over ‘information’ have rooted themselves in the concept of national strategic cultures. Davies, for example, details what he regards as differences in the British and American approaches to defining intelligence. Noting that the tendency of countries to employ different definitions of intelligence has both conceptual and substantive implications – all of which contribute to the national strategic culture of each country – he points to cultural differences over the role of information. He contends that the US approaches information as a specific component of intelligence, whilst Britain approaches intelligence as a specific type of information.³⁷ In the latter case, he argues that the British definition is narrower, referring only to a ‘particular kind of information gathered from indirect or clandestine sources, in

³⁴ Ibid.

³⁵ Mark Lowenthal, *Intelligence: From Secrets to Policy* (Washington: CQ Press, 2002), p. 8.

³⁶ Laqueur, *World of Secrets*, pp. 11-12.

³⁷ Davies, ‘Divergent National Concepts’, pp. 14-16.

which ‘intelligence’ usually denotes the raw material gathered. By contrast, in the US, he states that intelligence is a broader category, subsuming both the collection and analysis of information, and considered closer to a product, than raw intelligence. This is certainly reflected in the enormous effort that the United States put into training analysts and their proliferating numbers.³⁸

A helpful repost has emerged within the literature on intelligence that moves away from the secrecy versus information dichotomy. Achieved through its inclusion of a broader range of sources – both overt and covert – this school of thought conceives of intelligence as more akin to a spectrum, in which secret intelligence is confined to a small fraction of what informs intelligence analysis. It is here that the thesis locates itself definitionally, in order to frame one of the core strands of argument running through the case study chapters, which argues that intelligence collected by SIS in Asia was a mix of both secret and non-secret information.

This definition of intelligence has commanded increasing acceptance in more recent literature, owing to broader political and societal changes that have impacted the manner in which information flows. In the contemporary context, both Rovner and Moran, draw attention to the increased numbers of non-state actors that have evolved the manner in which intelligence is both gathered and produced. Pointing to both the increased production *and* consumption of information acquired by private groups (including the likes of water supplies, electricity companies, and even airline companies),³⁹ he observes that their inadvertent involvement in gathering intelligence has made intelligence ‘increasingly difficult to define in the twenty-first century ... challenging the assertion that intelligence is organised by the state for the state’.⁴⁰ A consensus is to be found amongst Andrew, Aldrich, and Wark, who note that the rise of non-state actors since the 1970s has had an impact on defining intelligence through the emergency of the market state. Whilst they also mention the growth of national infrastructure and telecommunications companies in gathering and consuming intelligence, they also point to the growth of open source intelligence (OSINT), which they argue has ‘blurred

³⁸ Philip J. Davies, ‘Intelligence Culture and Intelligence Failure in Britain and the United States’, *Cambridge Review of International Affairs*, 17:3 (2004), p. 500.

³⁹ See Joshua Rovner, ‘Intelligence in the Twitter Age’, *International Journal of Intelligence and Counterintelligence*, 26:2 (2013), pp. 260-271.

⁴⁰ Moran, ‘Coming to Clarity’, p. 45.

traditional distinctions between intelligence and information, and the barrier between secret and non-secret'. Describing intelligence collection as somewhat closer to an 'interactive network', this conception of intelligence is thus based around the actors involved, rather than information or secrecy per se.⁴¹

Perhaps the most useful idea of intelligence to emerge from this school of thought resides in Hibbert's conception of intelligence as a 'layer cake'. Hibbert is notably authoritative voice, having served initially in wartime SOE and then having risen to be Deputy Under-Secretary in the Foreign Office.⁴² In his discussion of intelligence and how it filters into foreign policy, he argues that for intelligence to be considered useful as a term, it must be used in a broader sense, beyond simply 'secrecy', given its proximity and use in foreign policy.⁴³ In this regard, he argues that 'every diplomatic service, every embassy or diplomatic becomes, in one of its aspects, and intelligence-collection agency', in which their main function is to collection the widest possible information about the nature and functioning of a foreign state and its government, and to relate this back to the needs of its own government. The objective is thus to provide 'as comprehensive and accurate a picture as possible of the attitudes, politics, political and economic imperatives, and likely course of action' of the foreign state in question.⁴⁴

Returning to his idea of a 'layer cake', he therefore disentangles intelligence, fragmenting it into fifty per cent open source material (including in the 'most security-minded totalitarian states'), ten to twenty per cent privileged material (usually obtained by diplomats through their privileged status), twenty to twenty-five per cent classified material (he denotes that its essential quality is that it is 'not bought or sold', but a product of normal diplomatic activity imparted in contravention of security criteria), and lastly, less than ten per cent secret intelligence. This is of great importance with situating the case study chapters, given that, as will be shown, the majority of what the British SIS

⁴¹ Andrew, Aldrich, and Wark, *Secret Intelligence*, pp. 1-2.

⁴² James Pettifer, 'Obituary: Sir Reginald Hibbert, Albanologist and Former Ambassador in Paris', *Gazette*, November 2002. He was also the first ever British diplomat posted in Mongolia, as Charge d'Affaires in Ulan Bator from 1964 to 1966. As we shall see, John Colvin and Daphne Park followed in his footsteps to that remote listening post.

⁴³ Reginald Hibbert, 'Intelligence and Policy', *Intelligence and National Security*, 5:1 (1990), pp. 10-11.

⁴⁴ *Ibid*, pp. 11-12.

officers collected in Hong Kong, Beijing, and Hanoi, was largely privileged or classified material, with the occasional piece of secret intelligence acquired as well. Furthermore, as Hibbert points out, the British Foreign Office itself was a ‘huge assessment machine’ that constituted a ‘capacious and versatile digestive system’ fed by the aforementioned material.⁴⁵ Given that one of its merits was a lesser degree of classification, it is partly for this reason that Foreign Office documents make up the crux of this thesis’s archival sources.

Other scholars arrive at similar conceptions of intelligence, albeit it with different structures. Johnson, for example, draws upon the notion of intelligence as a jigsaw puzzle, asserting that many different types of information together form the whole picture, most of which will originate from publicly available documents. In the American context, he argues that whilst the ‘overwhelming percentage – sometimes upwards of ninety-five per cent’ of intelligence reports to US policymakers is based on open sources, the small portion of clandestine material can be vital, providing the secret ‘nugget’ to understand foreign adversaries’ plans.⁴⁶ By contrast, Hibbert adopts a slightly different stance, arguing that ‘modern governments have three foreign intelligence systems: diplomacy, the intelligence community, and the overseas links of other governmental departments’ (including treasuries, health, transport, etc.).⁴⁷ Although he diverges from Herman in his assessment of covert intelligence, arguing that this is insufficiently reflected in the ‘layer cake’ concept, as in his view, ‘it probably rivals all the layers of the diplomatic system put together’,⁴⁸ he nonetheless conceives of the actors that gather intelligence as ‘sitting at various points on a continuum’ between overt and covert sources of collection.⁴⁹ As this section has sought to show, defining intelligence carries with it significant issues for the scholar, particularly when faced with the ‘secrecy versus information’ binary that so commonly divides the literature. However, more sophisticated understandings of intelligence that avoid this dichotomy – represented by the likes of Herman, Johnson, and Hibbert – serve to

⁴⁵ Ibid, p. 111.

⁴⁶ Johnson, ‘Introduction’, pp. 3-4.

⁴⁷ Michael Herman, ‘Intelligence and Policy: A Comment’, *Intelligence and National Security*, 6:1 (1991), p. 239.

⁴⁸ Ibid, p. 233.

⁴⁹ Ibid, p. 231.

provide a useful, more encompassing definition of intelligence that underpins the content of the case studies in this thesis.

The Special Relationship

The following section will turn its attention to the illustrious ‘Special Relationship’ between Britain and the United States, focusing particularly upon intelligence. The dynamics of alliance generally have constituted a sizeable area of activity for scholars of both international history and international relations. The motivations of long-term alliance beyond immediate security emergencies are broadly considered to be either power maximisation, ideological affinity or liberal-institutional partnerships. Official explanations have tended to emphasise common ideals, but in recent years, scholars have tended to emphasise realist explanations.⁵⁰

Since Richelson and Ball’s landmark piece on post-war intelligence cooperation between Western countries in the 1980s, the dynamics of the Special Relationship during the Cold War have been subject to much consideration and debate amongst scholars. Labelled as a ‘significant feature of twentieth-century history’ by Jeffreys-Jones, he argues that intelligence became a ‘vital ingredient’ in the national security arrangements of democratic countries in alliance such as the UK, the US, Canada, Australia, and New Zealand. Moreover, given its academic value as the ‘world’s most dominant example of liaison’ from an intelligence perspective, the relationship’s dynamics merit further exploration.⁵¹

Boasting close political, military, and economic ties, conventional literature on the Special Relationship has portrayed intimate cooperation, exchange, and most importantly, an even footing,

⁵⁰ The classic literature includes: T.J. Christensen and Jack L. Snyder, ‘Chain Gangs and Passed Bucks: Predicting Alliance Patterns in Multipolarities in Multipolarity,’ *International Organisation*, 44:2 (1990); Ole Holsti, P. Terrence Hopmann, and John D. Sullivan, *Unity and Disintegration in International Alliances: Comparative Studies* (New York, 1973); Stephen M. Walt, *The Origins of Alliances* (Ithaca, 1987).

⁵¹ Rhodri Jeffreys-Jones, ‘The End of an Exclusive Special Intelligence Relationship: British-American Intelligence Cooperation Before, During, and After the 1960s’, *Intelligence and National Security*, 27:5 (2012), p. 707.

between the two main transatlantic allies. Key thinkers belonging to this school of thought, such as Dumbrell, argue that in addition to close cultural ties, including historical and linguistic connections, the longevity Special Relationship has its roots in the ‘intimate combination of defence and intelligence linkages’, going as far back as Roosevelt and Churchill’s relationship in the early 1940s.⁵² Such approaches are often related to institutional understandings of the Special Relationship; Dumbrell, for example, highlights the ‘institutions, habits, and strategic choices’ of both allies that have proven their ability to ‘reshape and survive’ other crises into the twenty-first century.⁵³ Moreover, he argues that the proximity of the two allies was the product of a response from a perceived mutual threat, stemming from the conditions of the end of the Second World War, and advent of the Cold War.⁵⁴ In this way, it is not surprising that military intelligence, especially around nuclear weapons, their targeting and their control, could be seen to dominate the Anglo-American Cold War intelligence relationship.

Significantly, a strong consensus exists as to the centrality of nuclear-related matters in setting the relationship’s foundations. Aldrich has observed how it is ‘often remarked’ that the twin pillars of US-UK security cooperation in the Cold War were nuclear weapons and intelligence exchange, the former the ‘subject of a number of impressive studies’, including by Clark, Melissen, and Baylis.⁵⁵ This is underpinned by other important works laying out the dynamics of the Special Relationship, such as Goodman, who argues that in the immediate post-war period, intelligence on the Soviet nuclear weapons programme was ‘vital’ to Anglo-American intelligence and military planning after the detonation of the first Soviet nuclear bomb.⁵⁶ Demonstrated through mutual primary intelligence targets on Soviet technological advances, cooperation over the Soviet long-range detection

⁵² John Dumbrell, ‘The US-UK Special Relationship’ in a World Twice Transformed’, *Cambridge Review of International Affairs*, 17:3 (2004), p. 437.

⁵³ Ibid, p. 439.

⁵⁴ Ibid, p. 438.

⁵⁵ Richard J. Aldrich, ‘British Intelligence and the Anglo-American ‘Special Relationship’ during the Cold War’, *Review of International Studies*, 24:3 (1998), p. 331. For more information, see the following: Ian Clark, *Nuclear Diplomacy and the Special Relationship: Britain's Deterrent and America, 1957-62* (Oxford, 1994); Jan Melissen, *The Struggle for Nuclear Partnership: Britain, the United States and the Making of an Ambiguous Alliance, 1952-9*, (Groningen, 1993); J. Baylis, *Ambiguity and Deterrence: British Nuclear Strategy, 1945-64* (Oxford, 1995).

⁵⁶ Michael Goodman, *Spying on the Nuclear Bear: Anglo-American Intelligence and the Soviet Bomb*, (Stanford, 2007), p. 2.

programme, and the Soviet nuclear weapons stockpile, he goes as far as to the label Anglo-American atomic intelligence 'in effect a 'special relationship' within the broader, more commonly referred to special relationship'.⁵⁷ Lastly, underlining the importance of information-sharing over nuclear-related matters, Dumbrell argues that the UK-USA Mutual Defence Agreement of 1958 'set the stage for an extended era of mutual intermeshing of defence technologies and policies', as well as a 'unique sharing of intelligence' unseen between other Western partners.⁵⁸

However, the significance of the Special Relationship lay not so much in the intimacy of intelligence and nuclear ties, but in just how much weight it carried in comparison to other areas of cooperation. Dumbrell underscores the resilience of the Special Relationship when it came to military and intelligence cooperation; despite major diplomatic fallout over foreign policy clashes such as Suez, Vietnam, and Grenada in 1983, he states that 'close military and intelligence linkages persisted', which were what elevated the Special Relationship to a status of 'an existence above and beyond the strategic choices of transnational political elites'.⁵⁹ A similar concurrence can be found in Aldrich, who discusses cooperation over strategic intelligence assessments between the two powers. Arguing that the compartmentalisation of the respective British and American intelligence agencies during the 1950s and 1960s was what 'rendered many aspects of Anglo-American intelligence cooperation particularly resilient', this allowed the relationship to be unshaken by foreign policy failures elsewhere.⁶⁰

Despite the perceived resilience of the Special Relationship, more recent scholarship on the subject has captured a different set of dynamics between Britain and the US, characterised by tension and what David Reynolds has called competitive co-operation.⁶¹ Emphasising a strong sense of divergence between the two allies, this revisionist school of thought argues that competition – and even animosity – was what characterised relations between the two partners, what Dumbrell and Ellis

⁵⁷ Ibid, pp. 2-3; 166.

⁵⁸ Dumbrell, 'The US-UK Special Relationship', pp. 437-438.

⁵⁹ Ibid.

⁶⁰ Aldrich, 'British Intelligence and the Anglo-American Special Relationship', pp. 336-7.

⁶¹ David Reynolds, 'Rethinking Anglo-American Relations', *International Affairs*, 65:1 (1988), pp. 89-111.

have labelled ‘the intensity of transatlantic antagonism’.⁶² Exemplary of scholarship dissecting the relationship’s decline over the course of the Cold War, Jeffreys-Jones argues that although Anglo-American relations reached a ‘Churchillian apogee’ in the 1940s and 1950s, domestic changes in the US, British decline, and differing approaches to foreign policy eroded at the exclusivity of the Special Relationship into the 1960s.⁶³ Noting the ‘migration of power to the other side of the Atlantic’, he firmly states that the mutual bond described by orthodox scholars ‘had no guarantee of permanence’.⁶⁴ Furthermore, although associated with more traditionalist accounts of the Special Relationship, Dumbrell notes that the phrase ‘special relationship’ has become ‘as much associated with British weakness and dependency’ as it has with transatlantic mutuality.⁶⁵ British decline has been singled out as a particularly significant factor in this breakdown. Often equated with imperial overstretch from the decline of the British Empire following the Second World War, numerous scholars have pointed to Britain’s flagging economic power as damaging the gravitas it previously held in the Special Relationship.⁶⁶

Yet, these changes owed much to broader diplomatic tension over foreign policy issues, linked in part to Britain’s decline. Drawing upon Reynold’s broader diplomatic framework of ‘competitive cooperation’, applied to the earlier Special Relationship in the late 1930s, Jeffreys-Jones points to tensions over the Fuchs affair, a shift in social attitudes, and accelerating decolonisation of the British empire as bringing about ‘shifts in power and political utility’ for Britain.⁶⁷ Furthermore, intelligence as it related to foreign policy did little more than inflame existing tensions. As Aldrich notes, CIA covert operations – some of which were ‘designed, in part, to modify some aspects of British foreign policy which were distasteful to Washington’, (including opposition to Euro

⁶² John Dumbrell and Sylvia Ellis, ‘British Involvement in Vietnam Peace Initiatives, 1966-67: Marigold, Sunflowers and ‘Kosygin Week’, *Diplomatic History*, 27:1 (2003), p. 145.

⁶³ Rhodri Jeffreys-Jones, ‘The End of an Exclusive Special Intelligence Relationship: British-American Intelligence Cooperation Before, During, and After the 1960s’, *Intelligence and National Security*, 27:5 (2012), p. 707.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 711-18.

⁶⁵ Dumbrell, ‘The US-UK Special Relationship’, p. 437.

⁶⁶ See for example: David Sanders, *Losing an Empire, Finding a Role: British Foreign Policy since 1945*, (Basingstoke, 1990); John Dumbrell, ‘The Johnson Administration and the British Labour Government: Vietnam, the Pound, and East of Suez’, *Journal of American Studies*, 30:2 (1996), pp. 211-231; Dumbrell and Ellis, ‘British Involvement in Vietnam Peace Initiatives’, p. 149.

⁶⁷ Jeffreys-Jones, ‘The End of an Exclusive Special Intelligence Relationship’, pp. 714-715.

federalism, and OEEC activities) contributed to an ‘unavoidable’ – if somewhat hostile – interplay between intelligence estimates and covert action.⁶⁸ This is further evidenced in a mid-1960s enquiry President Johnson commissions into the British MI5 and other agencies. In the wake of the Ramparts affair, the US sought to establish if there were lessons that could be adopted from the British model, only to reject the British intelligence model (in particular, the Foreign Office’s Information Research Department).⁶⁹ However, for Aldrich, this mirrored broader Anglo-American disagreements over détente in the late 1950s, as well as divergence between the CIA and SIS in areas like the Middle East. As such, intelligence was more a component of the realist ‘bargain’ between the two powers, rather than an unconditional alliance.⁷⁰

The acute and growing asymmetry within the Special Relationship during this period has drawn strong attention from revisionist scholars. Claiming that the Special Relationship was an ‘Anglo-American myth’, Beloff argues that such were divergences in foreign policy, that by the 1960s, the notion of the ‘special relationship’ was ‘something of an irritant’ to American officials.⁷¹ Vietnam was a particular bone of contention between the two powers. In their excellent discussion of the Kosygin-Wilson peace talks in 1967 over Vietnam, Dumbrell and Ellis assert that the late 1960s were characterised as a period of an ‘extremely high level of mutual distrust, impatience, and even personal dislike’ pervading Anglo-American relations.⁷² Underlining Wilson’s desire for a close relationship with US President Johnson, they note the manner in which foreign policy divergences – most notably, Britain’s refusal to engage militarily in Vietnam – called into question Wilson’s faith in diplomacy. The ramifications were clear – surrounding diplomatic ties were ‘problems of mutual incomprehension, resentment, and mistrust’.⁷³ A similar sentiment is echoed in Ruane’s work, who, tracing divergence in British and US foreign policy back to the Geneva Conference of 1954, describes the ‘smouldering resentment’ felt in Washington at London’s refusal to support action in Vietnam. In

⁶⁸ Aldrich, ‘British Intelligence and the Anglo-American Special Relationship’, p. 338.

⁶⁹ Jeffreys-Jones, ‘The End of an Exclusive Special Intelligence Relationship’, p. 720.

⁷⁰ Ibid, pp. 338-339.

⁷¹ Ibid, p. 718.

⁷² Dumbrell and Ellis, ‘British Involvement in Vietnam Peace Initiatives’, p. 145.

⁷³ Ibid, pp. 145-148.

his view, this aggravated Anglo-American tensions ‘to the gravest strain’.⁷⁴ It is for this reason that, as Jeffreys-Jones has stated, by the late 1960s, the term ‘Special Relationship’ was only really invoked by the UK, by then the clear junior partner.⁷⁵

One particular strand of thought within the revisionist school argues that such was Britain’s fragility in the 1960s, that it had little to offer the US other than intelligence and a shrinking array of global military bases. In these terms, Britain stood to gain considerably more from the alliance than its counterpart. Baylis argues that Britain’s proximity with the US allowed it to increase its own security by cutting the costs of its own strategic deterrent. This was particularly true when it came to US troop commitment in Europe, as the US was able to take over some of Britain’s defence commitments.⁷⁶ Moreover, Smith adds that the US had considerably less to gain from this partnership, owing to the fact that it had several special relationships, such as with West Germany, Japan, Israel, and Canada during the Cold War. Resultantly, he maintains that because of these disparities in global power, the Special Relationship ‘as viewed from Washington, often looked less important than it appeared in London’.⁷⁷

Crucially, a sub-school within the revisionist literature has argued that in light of its own decline, Britain sought to utilise the Special Relationship as a diplomatic tool. Where Britain’s economic and political prowess might once have carried weight, into the 1960s, Britain had to rely upon two key weapons left in its arsenal in order to influence the US: what Aldrich has referred to as its ‘residual empire’, and intelligence. Dumbrell, for example, argues that this reification of the Special Relationship was, to some degree, purposefully fostered by political elites in the UK, who regarded a strong partnership with the US as ‘the best way to manage and finesse British international decline’.⁷⁸ These dynamics played themselves out over Vietnam and China in particular as matters of notable divergence between the two partners.

⁷⁴ Kevin Ruane, ‘Containing America? Aspects of British Foreign Policy and the Cold War in Southeast Asia, 1951-54’, *Diplomacy and Statecraft*, 7:1 (1996), pp. 141-143.

⁷⁵ Jeffreys-Jones, ‘The End of an Exclusive Special Intelligence Relationship’, p. 711.

⁷⁶ Baylis, *Ambiguity and Deterrence*, p. 213.

⁷⁷ Steve Smith, ‘The Special Relationship’, *Political Studies*, 38:1 (2006), p. 133.

⁷⁸ Dumbrell, ‘The US-UK Special Relationship’, p. 438.

Given the recognised inferiority of the British as the junior partner in the Special Relationship, Britain sought to exert its influence upon the Americans in order to effectively contain the latter's foreign policy. Although somewhat an anomaly in this strand of thought, given that they reject the notion of Britain's imperial decline, Marsh and Baylis nonetheless argue that Britain sought to 'guide the naïve American giant' on the international stage by making the Special Relationship forward-looking, and still relevant to the US.⁷⁹ Asserting that the relationship was merely 'informally special' at best, they maintain that Britain's use of its colonies and informal empire for defence cooperation was able to placate US anti-colonial sentiment.⁸⁰ In a similar vein, both Ruane and Dockrill contend that Britain's economic difficulties meant it could no longer maintain its overseas commitments as it had done in its imperial heyday. Fearing damage to its prestige and international standing, the solution manifested itself in 'burdensharing', principally with the US.⁸¹ Furthermore, Ruane points to Vietnam as a key area of contention. Fearing that US military intervention might have provoked a Chinese response, precipitating an 'Asian or even a global conflagration', this prompted Britain's strategy to essentially contain the Americans in Asia.⁸²

Lastly, intelligence was a key tool by which Britain was able to harness to offset the asymmetry of the Special Relationship. Upholding intelligence as Britain's 'most important' contribution to the Special Relationship, Aldrich asserts that although the UK's intelligence-gathering capabilities declined relative to the US after 1945, the rate of their decline was still slower than that of British military capabilities.⁸³ Significantly, he argues that Britain's value in the Special Relationship derived from its 'residual empire'; in both nuclear and intelligence exchange, Britain's overseas territories provided 'invaluable political contacts, but also a vast panoply of key airbases, naval installations, and suitable sites for technical collection'. Although he notes the caveat that precise nature of Britain's contribution remains 'something of an imponderable', he nevertheless points to an

⁷⁹ Steve Marsh and John Baylis, 'The Anglo-American Special Relationship: The Lazarus of International Relations', *Diplomacy and Statecraft*, 17:1 (2006), pp. 173-174.

⁸⁰ Ibid, pp. 182-195.

⁸¹ ⁸¹ Ruane, 'Containing America?', pp. 145-148; M. L. Dockrill, 'The Foreign Office, Anglo-American Relations, and the Korean War, June 1950-June 1951', *International Affairs*, 62:3 (1986), pp. 459-476.

⁸² Ruane, 'Containing America?', pp. 141-143.

⁸³ Aldrich, 'British Intelligence and the Anglo-American Special Relationship', p. 348.

‘unrivalled network’ that served US foreign policy interests, and in some cases provided ‘indispensable’ contributions to US security arrangements.⁸⁴ Noting that British technical intelligence collection systems were more ‘immune to imperial retreat’ than other defence capabilities, Britain was able to maintain (sometimes undeclared) collection systems in former colonial territories, and was particularly strong in the area of non-Soviet targets, including China, Vietnam, and later, Africa.⁸⁵

The Special Intelligence Relationship in Asia

Having examined the broader literature on the dynamics of the Special Relationship, the following section surveys existing literature on the Special *Intelligence* Relationship in Asia. Aldrich observes that, although various scholars have written about Anglo-American exchange over nuclear and defence intelligence, intelligence on its own is ‘rarely subjected to sustained analysis or integrated into the context of the discussion’.⁸⁶ For example, although Richelson and Ball wrote a seminal piece in the mid-1980s on post-war intelligence cooperation between Western countries, he argues that this focused too heavily upon organisational and structural features, rather than considering the impact of intelligence estimates upon national security or alliance systems as a whole.⁸⁷ Furthermore, Aldrich adds that, despite the substantial archival releases of new documentation since the end of the Cold War (by London, Washington, and Moscow), ‘constraints still continue to operate’, the biggest consequence of which seems to have been the ‘relative dearth of other serious studies in the field’, when contrasted with the deluge of memoirs and personal accounts from the past two decades.⁸⁸ With

⁸⁴ Ibid, pp. 349-350.

⁸⁵ Ibid.

⁸⁶ Ibid, p 335. He points to C. J. Bartlett, *'The Special Relationship': A Political History of Anglo-American Relations since 1945* (London, 1992); Robert M. Hathaway, *Great Britain and the United States: Special Relations Since World War Two*, (Boston, 1990). For two exceptions see the useful discussions in Christopher Hitchens, *Blood, Class and Nostalgia: Anglo-American Ironies* (London, 1990); David Reynolds, ‘A ‘Special Relationship’? America, Britain and the International Order since the Second World War’, *International Affairs*, 62:1 (1985), pp. 1-20. On liaison generally, see H. Bradford Westerfield, *America and the World of Liaison*, *Intelligence and National Security*, 11:3 (1996), pp. 523-60.

⁸⁷ Ibid, p. 334.

⁸⁸ Ibid, p. 335.

this in mind, this section attempts to map out existing literature on the Special Intelligence Relationship in Asia, whilst also observing the notable gaps in knowledge that exist on this subject, across a range of disciplines.

Diplomatic historians have covered in considerable depth the history of the Special Relationship in Asia across the breadth of the Cold War. Given the degree of diplomatic divergence over the region, this has given rise to numerous detailed studies of diplomatic negotiations, political crises, and wilting alliances, particularly during the 1960s. For example, John Young, Sylvia Ellis, Peter Busch, Gerald Hughes, and Greg Kennedy have devoted substantial pieces to researching the dynamics of 'transatlantic antagonism' between the two allies, between them covering the ramifications of Britain's decolonisation, failed peace talks with the US, and the more personal relationships that characterised the Special Relationship.⁸⁹

However, it is worth noting that whilst these works together provide an excellent overview of the Special Relationship in Asia, intelligence palpably remains as the 'missing dimension' of diplomatic history. This is despite its proximity and indeed, its direct involvement in foreign policy-making, particularly through national strategic assessments. To give but one example, Kear's account of the British Consulate-General in Hanoi in the 1960s fails to take account of the fact that six consecutive Consul-Generals stationed in Hanoi were SIS officers.⁹⁰ Similarly, Young, Ellis, et al. fail to account for the intelligence dimension of diplomatic negotiations between the UK and US over delicate matters such as Vietnam. This is particularly discerning as both British and American archives are replete with documents and cables from intelligence officers and agencies seeking to establish the political climate surrounding negotiations between the Western and Asian powers (especially China and North Vietnam).⁹¹

⁸⁹ John Young, *Wilson Government and the Davies Mission*; Ellis, *Britain, America and the Vietnam War*; Pedaliu, 'Transatlantic Relations at a Time When 'More Flags' Meant 'No European Flags'; Busch, *Busch, All the Way with JFK?: Britain, the US, and the Vietnam War*, (New York, 2003), Hughes, *Wilson's Cold War*; Vaughan, *Anglo-American Relations in the Vietnam War*; Thorne, *Allies of a Kind*; Greg Kennedy, *Anglo-American Strategic Relations and the Far East, 1933-1939*, (London, 2002).

⁹⁰ See Simon Kear, 'The British Consulate-General in Hanoi, 1954-1973', *Diplomacy and Statecraft*, 10:1 (1999), pp. 215-39.

⁹¹ Exceptions include Busch, *All the Way with JFK*.

An overview of the intelligence history of Asia also presents us with a stark contrast. Intelligence collection and cooperation before and during the Second World War is rich in depth of discussion. Ranging from British intelligence and codebreaking, to Allied intelligence cooperation, an overabundance of works exists in this respect.⁹² However, literature on British intelligence in Asia is more limited in scope, with much research focusing upon Japan and the Pacific theatre of war,⁹³ an exception perhaps being Aldrich's research into 'imperial rivalry' in Asia prior to 1946, going against the grain of the overall pattern of the wartime Special Intelligence Relationship.⁹⁴ However, the same cannot be said for the British SIS in Asia, in which existing literature is considerably more scattered and fragmentary. Whilst it must be noted that seminal monographs exist on a more general history of SIS, by scholars such as Dorril, Jeffrey, West, Davies, and Bower, constant to all their work are the holes that appear on SIS in Asia. Other than the mention of a handful of SIS officers that they acknowledge were posted to stations in Asia, little, if any, real coverage is given to British intelligence collection in any of these pieces.⁹⁵ In contrast to the Special Operations Executive (SOE), for which there is substantially more work, few standalone pieces exist on SIS, other than Aldrich's piece on Britain's SIS in Asia during the Second World War, and Davies' structural piece on SIS in Singapore and the Far Eastern Controller.⁹⁶ Whilst this is undoubtedly due in part to archival record retention.

⁹² For example, on British intelligence during the Second World War, see: R. V. Jones, *The Wizard War: British Scientific Intelligence 1939-1945* (New York, 1978); Francis H. Hinsley and Michael Howard, *British Intelligence in the Second World War*, (New York, 1979—1990); David Alvarez, (ed.), *Allied and Axis Signals Intelligence in World War II* (London, 1999), 146-167. See also John Ferris, *The British Army and Signals Intelligence during the First World War*, (Stroud, 1992).

⁹³ For example, see: Antony Best, *British Intelligence and the Japanese Challenge in Asia, 1914-1941*, (Basingstoke, 2002); Douglas Ford, *Britain's Secret War Against Japan, 1937-45*, (London, 2006); Alan Stripp, *Codebreaker in the Far East*, (Oxford, 1989).

⁹⁴ Richard J. Aldrich, 'Imperial Rivalry: British and American Intelligence in Asia, 1942-1946', *Intelligence and National Security*, 3:1 (1988), pp. 5-55.

⁹⁵ See the following: Stephen Dorril, *Inside the World of Her Majesty's Secret Intelligence Service*, (New York, 2000); Keith Jeffery, *MI6: The History of the Secret Intelligence Service, 1909-1949*, (London, 2010); Nigel West, *MI6: British Secret Intelligence Service Operations, 1905-1945*, (New York, 1983); Philip H. J. Davies, *MI6 and the Machinery of Spying: Structure and Process in Britain's Secret Intelligence Service*, (Abingdon, 2004); Gordon Corera, *The Art of Betrayal: The Secret History of MI6*, (New York, 2012); Tom Bower, *Red Web: MI6 and the KGB Master Coup*, (London, 1989).

⁹⁶ Richard J. Aldrich, 'Britain's Secret Intelligence Service during the Second World War', *Modern Asian Studies*, 32:1 (1998), pp. 179-217; Philip H. J. Davies, 'The SIS Singapore Station and the Role of the Far East Controller: Secret Intelligence Structure and Process in Postwar Colonial Administration', *Intelligence and National Security*, 14:4 (1999), 105-129. For Britain's SOE, see Charles Greg Cruickshank, *SOE in the Far East*, (Oxford, 1983); Richard Gough, *SOE Singapore*,

The still classified MI6 records are especially weak on both the Middle East and Asia, compared to Europe.⁹⁷ Moreover, from the early 1970s onwards, significant amounts of Foreign Office and other records on Asia are still withheld in the National Archive at Kew, as well as the unfortunate lack of surviving intelligence officers from this period, it still begs the question as to why such little has been written on SIS in Asia, compared to Russia, Europe, and the Middle East.

Beyond 1945, however, and into the Cold War, the landscape on British intelligence in Asia becomes much sparser, particularly with regard to the Special Relationship. A small cluster of research exists around British signals intelligence in Asia. Thomas details British signals intelligence in the immediate post-war period, lending some attention to Hong Kong, whilst Ball devotes a piece to British signals intelligence operating out of the Little Sai Wan station in Hong Kong, lending some attention to American signals intelligence from there too.⁹⁸ Without doubt, the most comprehensive piece to be found not simply on British intelligence, but also intelligence exchange, is Aldrich's study of Anglo-American competitive co-operation over intelligence during the early Cold War, including Asia, although this study does not extend much beyond the 1950s.⁹⁹ Most of these limitations on British intelligence history in Asia exist, in no small part, because of documentation availability in the archives. As discussed in the methodology, this is without doubt a key factor in the ability of the intelligence historian to access later chapter of SIS and GCHQ's history in Asia in the late 1960s and beyond.

Action leaves a more visible trail than espionage. Accordingly, a substantial body of work exists on the nexus between British intelligence, special operations, subversion, and propaganda in the post-war period in Asia. In 2000, the Institute of Asia-Pacific Studies convened a conference on the *Clandestine Cold War in Asia*, in co-operation with SOAS. Attended by a number of retired

1941-42, (London, 1985); Christopher J. Murphy, *Security and Special Operations: SOE and MI5 during the Second World War*, (Basingstoke, 2006); Alan Ogden, *Tigers Burning Bright: SOE Heroes in the Far East*, (New York, 2013).

⁹⁷ Private information.

⁹⁸ See Andy Thomas, 'British Signals Intelligence after the Second World War', *Intelligence and National Security*, 3:4 (1988), pp. 103-110; Desmond Ball, 'Over and Out: Signals Intelligence (Sigint) in Hong Kong', *Intelligence and National Security*, 11:3 (1996), pp. 474-496.

⁹⁹ Richard Aldrich, *The Hidden Hand: Britain, America, and Cold War Secret Intelligence* (London, 2001).

practitioners, including John Colvin, the papers dealt with subjects such as British covert support in Malaya, American espionage and psychological operations in Hong Kong, as well as work on Singapore, Korea, and Burma.¹⁰⁰ Furthermore, Baxter details the operations of British Intelligence in Asia during the immediate post-war period in a carefully researched article on MI6, McKnight discusses SEATO's interaction with Asian security organisations during the earlier Cold War, and Easter discusses the British propaganda campaign against Indonesia during the Confrontation, fed by British human and signals intelligence.¹⁰¹ It is worth noting that this coverage is largely reflective upon the archival records behind them – and as such, revealing of the difference in accessibility between intelligence records, as opposed to covert action or propaganda records. Having previously mentioned the newest releases pertaining to the Mau Mau insurgency in 2011, a large body of work exists on the Foreign Office's Information Research Department in Asia.¹⁰²

Nonetheless, despite the shortcomings of both intelligence and diplomatic history in this area, a handful of important pieces exist on the Special Intelligence Relationship in Asia. Between them, they span the sub-disciplines of intelligence, international relations, and diplomacy. Intersecting with all of these disciplines, it becomes clear that intelligence exchange between Western allies is perhaps the area afforded the greatest level of depth by scholars. For example, in what is considered one of the

¹⁰⁰ Richard Aldrich, Gary D. Rawnsley, Ming Yeh T. Rawnsley, *The Clandestine Cold War in Asia, 1945-64: Western Intelligence, Propaganda, and Special Operations*, (London, 2000).

¹⁰¹ Christopher Baxter, 'A Closed Book? British Intelligence and East Asia, 1945-1950', *Diplomacy and Statecraft*, 22:1 (2011), pp. 4-27; David McKnight, 'Western Intelligence and SEATO's War on Subversion: 1956-63', *Intelligence and National Security*, 20:2 (2005), pp. 288-303; David Easter, 'British Intelligence and Propaganda during the Confrontation, 1963-66', *Intelligence and National Security*, 16:2 (2001), pp. 83-102. Baxter served as researcher on the official history of MI6.

¹⁰² For example, see: Susan Carruthers, 'A Red under Every Bed?: Anti-Communist Propaganda and Britain's Response to Colonial Insurgency', *Contemporary Record*, 9:2 (1995), pp. 294-318; J. M. Lee, 'British Cultural Diplomacy and the Cold War: 1946-61', *Diplomacy and Statecraft*, 9:1 (1998), pp. 112-134; Paul Lashmar and James Oliver, *Britain's Secret Propaganda War*, (Stroud, 1992); Hugh Wilford, 'The Information Research Department: Britain's Secret Cold War Weapon Revealed', *Review of International Studies*, 24:3 (1998), pp. 353-369; Andrew Defty, 'Close and Continuous Liaison': British Anti-Communist Propaganda and Cooperation with the United States, 1950-51', *Intelligence and National Security*, 17:4 (2002), pp. 100-130; Tony Shaw, 'The Information Research Department of the British Foreign Office and the Korean War', 1950-53', *Journal of Contemporary History*, 34:2 (1999), pp. 263-281; T.J. Maguire, 'Counter-Subversion in Early Cold War Britain: The Official Committee on Communism (Home), the Information Research Department, and 'State-Private Networks'', *Intelligence and National Security* 30:5 (2015), pp.637-66.

key contributions to intelligence exchange as a topic of research, Walsh comparatively discusses intelligence sharing between the US and Britain, France, and Germany – the latter all of which are considered junior partners to the US during the Cold War. Adopting an approach that examines the Special Intelligence Relationship through ‘relational contracting’ – a process based on trust and neoliberal institutionalism – he discusses the utility of Britain’s contribution to the Special Relationship, arguing that there was ‘little need for a hierarchical relationship’ when it came to intelligence exchange between the allies.¹⁰³

Yet, Walsh’s emphasis rests very much upon the Soviet Union as Britain’s main focus for intelligence gathering. Although he discusses, to a limited extent, British facilities in Asia which were able to grant the US better access to ‘listening posts’ on the USSR (such as Hong Kong and Singapore), his research on British intelligence collection in Asia is minimal. As such, it offers little on the impact of British intelligence upon broader Anglo-American relations.¹⁰⁴ Similar issues arise in other important pieces that address British intelligence and the Special Relationship. Located in the school upholding the notion that the Special Intelligence Relationship was able to rise above foreign policy divergences, Aldrich contextualises the nature of Anglo-American intelligence cooperation over the Soviet Bloc and China. Arguing that such intelligence activities retained a resilience because they were ‘specialised, compartmentalised, or technical’ in face of foreign policy disagreements,¹⁰⁵ he observes that part of this link’s strength also lay in on-the-ground difficulties of collecting intelligence in such hostile territories, pointing to the perilous nature of human operations, and secure enemy communications systems. Under such conditions of informational ‘famine’, he states that the British and Commonwealth contributions were ‘indispensable’.¹⁰⁶ However, emphasis in this piece rests more so upon the changing dynamics of the Special Intelligence Relationship, than the nature and value of the British contribution in Asia.

A few other pieces make a more concerted link between British intelligence in Asia and the Special Relationship. Devoting one chapter to the decline of the Special Relationship in Vietnam

¹⁰³ James Igoe Walsh, *The International Politics of Intelligence Sharing*, (New York, 2010), p. 29.

¹⁰⁴ Ibid, pp. 33-34.

¹⁰⁵ Aldrich, ‘British Intelligence and the Anglo-American Special Relationship’, pp. 341-342.

¹⁰⁶ Ibid, pp. 341-344.

during the Cold War, Jeffreys-Jones discusses the notion of Anglo-American rivalry, described as being ‘as evident in the world of spies as in that of diplomats’.¹⁰⁷ Noting British economic decline, the piece positions itself within the school of thought that Britain sought to construct a relationship with the US that would preserve Britain’s illusion of imperial power amidst its decline. Yet, other than a brief allude to ‘notable contributions’ to both joint successes and failures with American intelligence partners, little detail emerges on their substance; instead, attention is focused upon the Thompson Advisory Mission to South Vietnam, entering counterinsurgency territory.¹⁰⁸ Thus, other than Vietnam’s status as a ‘source of awkwardness’ between the allies, Britain’s intelligence value remains hidden within this territory.

Perhaps the best work on British intelligence in Asia as it relates to the Special Relationship is to be found in Aldrich’s *Hidden Hand*. Writing within the ‘deep strand of ambiguity’ injected into the Special Relationship as both allies sought to manage their presence on the global stage, he observes that a tension arose alongside the realisation that a ‘global intelligence system was synonymous with successful management of empire’.¹⁰⁹ Although this ‘lent a new utility to the remnants’ of Britain’s former empire, this was somewhat tempered in Asia, which he labels an area of ‘unspecial’ relations between the UK and US, owing to deep economic and foreign policy divergences.¹¹⁰ However, Aldrich provides the most comprehensive account of British intelligence collection in China and Hong Kong within this framework, arguing that ‘China, not the Soviet Union, was the ‘driver’ in American policy’ during the later twentieth century, which ‘electrified Anglo-American differences’.¹¹¹ Crucially, his work on this study was carried out in the 1990s, in a period of documentary scarcity, and at a time when electronic databases were in their infancy, limiting its scope. Nevertheless, his argument that British and American disagreements over a wider regional war lent further purpose to

¹⁰⁷ Rhodri Jeffreys-Jones, *In Spies We Trust: The Story of Western Intelligence*, (Oxford, 2013), p. 128.

¹⁰⁸ Ibid, pp. 131-140.

¹⁰⁹ Aldrich, *The Hidden Hand*, p. 9.

¹¹⁰ Ibid, p. 293.

¹¹¹ Ibid, p. 313.

British agents and signals intelligence from Asia is of real value in framing this thesis's evidential base and argument.¹¹²

Conclusion

The review of literature undertaken above is of utility in framing this thesis's arguments, and in locating its contribution to knowledge. Having examined the 'what is intelligence?' debate so prolific amongst intelligence historians and practitioners, this chapter has focused on a dichotomy that runs through much of the literature, between defining 'intelligence' according to secrecy, or information. However, it has also presented an alternative school of thought which regards 'intelligence' as something more akin to a spectrum, in which both overt and covert material are situated, the latter being but a smaller proportion of what intelligence services gather abroad. This is particularly true in the British context, and serves us well by setting up the range of material British SIS officers gathered in Asia, as the case study chapters will demonstrate.

This chapter has also presented an overview of the 'Special Relationship' between Britain and the United States, in both diplomatic, and intelligence terms. It has contrasted two key schools of thought that differ in their regard to the dynamics of the Special Relationship, outlining orthodox thinking on a more balanced, mutual relationship between the two allies, against revisionist thinking on 'transatlantic antagonism'. This debate is important for situating the broader argument offered by the thesis; namely that British intelligence gathering in Asia took place against the dynamics of an inverse relationship, in which Britain was very much the junior partner, able to punch above its weight through its intelligence contribution.

Lastly, this chapter has demonstrated the limited scale of literature on British intelligence in Asia, particularly as it relates to the Special Relationship. Although intelligence history is a diverse and vibrant field, there remain many shortcomings to research on the British SIS, hindered in no small part by the limited access scholars have to declassified documents, particularly in the later stages of

¹¹² Ibid, pp. 305-313.

the Cold War. However, there are a few vital pieces that make the connection between British intelligence collection in Asia with the broader Special Intelligence Relationship. These are key to framing the broader argument offered by the thesis. Nonetheless, this overview also points to real gaps in knowledge on the specificities of SIS intelligence collection in Asia. This is vital for this thesis's contribution to knowledge, as the activities of SIS officers in Hong Kong, Beijing, and Hanoi have gone largely unnoticed. With this in mind, and the snippets of information offered in existing literature about these stations, this thesis aims to make a contribution to the field through a fuller account of SIS intelligence collection in these three locations through a careful review of the extant archival materials.

The Special Intelligence Relationship in Asia

Britain and the United States emerged from the Second World War in the pursuit of two contrasting approaches to foreign policy.¹ Although both were driven by an ideological commitment to contain the spread of Communism – albeit it to varying degrees – differing political and economic stances determined their policies. Most notably, Britain was undergoing a protracted ‘crisis of empire’, its engagement in the Cold War plagued by an almost continual state of imperial retreat and defence over-stretch. While Britain was determined to escape from empire, Whitehall and Washington were anxious that this should not leave a vacuum that might be filled by communism.²

Epitomised by the politics of ‘diplomatic divergence’, as discussed in the literature review chapter, the contrasting approaches of Britain and America to these complex problems manifested themselves most obviously in Asia, rendering it a particularly significant theatre of operations for the Special Intelligence Relationship. Its strategic importance to both powers meant that their various interventions in the region created both opportunities and sources of friction when it came to intelligence gathering. As Jones argues, London and Washington were unable to overcome the frequent differences of views and policies in their responses to the Communist threat, the most obvious sign being their divergence over the recognition of the People’s Republic of China.³ Britain

¹ D. Reynolds, ‘Rethinking Anglo-American Relations’, *International Affairs*, 65:1 (1988), pp. 89-111.

² S. Dockrill, *Britain's Retreat from East of Suez: The Choice between Europe and the World?* (London, 2002); A.I. Singh, *The Limits of British Influence: South Asia and the Anglo-American Relationship, 1947-56* (London, 1993); R.J. McMahon, *The Cold War on the Periphery: The United States, India, and Pakistan*, (New York, 1994).

³ Matthew Jones, ‘“Maximum Disavowable Aid”: Britain, the United States, and the Indonesian Rebellion, 1957-58’, *The English Historical Review*, 114:459 (1999), p. 1216.

recognised Communist China in 1949, while the United States held out until Nixon's famous rapprochement with Beijing in the 1970s.⁴

As this chapter will explain, on a broader level, diplomatic divergence extended across Asia. Britain and the United States clashed over policy in countries including China, Korea, Vietnam, and Indonesia. Critically, this also manifested itself in intelligence policy at both a strategic and tactical level; the American CIA and British SIS were often at odds over approaches to countering Communism, particularly as Britain struggled with limited resources and political tensions stemming from its dwindling empire. London was especially sceptical about the CIA's enthusiasm for propaganda and covert action, often conducted in collaboration with Taiwan or Chinese exiles and dissidents.⁵

However, this also meant that intelligence collection lent a new utility to the remnants of Britain's empire in Asia, particularly in areas in which the US found itself lacking 'eyes and ears'. Through a brief historical overview of the Special Intelligence Relationship in Asia, this chapter aims to provide context to the later dynamics of Cold War intelligence gathering in the region in the mid to late-1960s. In doing so, it also seeks to demonstrate the strategic importance of Asia – not only in terms of the wealth of intelligence sources it provided Britain with – but also with regard to the broader value it lent to Britain's 'residual empire'. It is important not to underestimate this last point – as the case studies seek to evidence, the intelligence 'take' that these territories facilitated was significant in offsetting British decline elsewhere in its foreign policy. It ultimately elevated Britain's worth in a relationship in which it was widely acknowledged to be the junior partner.

The Remnants of Empire

Intelligence collection lent a new utility to the remnants of Britain's empire located in Asia. Britain's imperial prestige had suffered a rapid decline with the onset of the Cold War, as it sought to re-

⁴ J.H. Tang, 'From empire defence to imperial retreat: Britain's postwar China policy and the decolonization of Hong Kong,' *Modern Asian Studies*, 28:02 (1994), pp. 317-337.

⁵ W.S. Lucas and Alistair Morey, 'The hidden 'alliance': The CIA and MI6 before and after Suez', *Intelligence and National Security*, 15:2 (2000), pp.95-120.

negotiate the status of its colonial territories into a Commonwealth of independent states. Outwardly seeking to present this as a series of smooth constitutional transitions commanding consensus on all sides, in reality there was much fighting. Tangled in a complex web of small wars and insurgencies throughout the post-war period, Britain lost significant territories that were either sympathetic to the USSR or stridently non-aligned and neutralist. Even those that remained closer to Britain were often fraught with their own, complex internal divisions. In the 1960s alone, Britain lost Cyprus, Singapore, Malta, Kenya, Aden, Uganda and Mauritius to independence.⁶ Nonetheless, it retained an extensive network of defence and intelligence bases across the majority of these territories, particularly in Asia. As Jones argues, Britain's 'residual imperial footholds' were what gave Britain access to resources and bases across Southeast Asia, ultimately allowing it to continue playing a strategic role in the containment of Communism well into the 1960s.⁷

Crucially, these footholds were nodal points for British intelligence collection as it struggled with the end of empire. This occurred in two main ways: firstly, the countries of the New Commonwealth were designated Crown territory and 'friendly countries', and resultantly received MI5 liaison officers to be stationed in them, working closely alongside internal security services and police forces.⁸ Whilst GCHQ and its sister agency, LCSA, provided cypher machines and technical support through diplomatic facilities there, turf wars between MI5 and SIS meant that the latter tended not to secure its own stations in these territories.⁹ However, as the case study chapters demonstrate, SIS was adept at placing its officers within diplomatic posts in order to discreetly gather intelligence from their confines. In fact, Easter also asserts that just as the CIA and KGB were doing, Britain also engaged in 'practical cryptanalysis' from its embassies, utilising human intelligence officers to supplement the secrets of cryptographic systems, by subverting cypher clerks, stealing cryptographic material, tapping communications, and even bugging embassies in order to gain more information on

⁶ David Easter, 'GCHQ and British External Policy in the 1960s', *Intelligence and National Security*, 23:5 (2008), pp. 683-5.

⁷ Jones, 'Maximum Disavowable Aid', p. 1216.

⁸ TNA, CAB 21/6006, Ministry of Defence Memo., 'The Counter-Subversion Committee', Annex to COS.1593/10/3/63, 10th March 1964.

⁹ Ibid.

codes.¹⁰ Some small consular posts, such as Ulan Bator, existed largely as a cover for electronic listening stations.¹¹

Secondly, other intelligence collection assets retained a lower profile in Britain's territories, which meant that they were able to survive imperial decline. Owing to Commonwealth connections, discreet leasing arrangements, and 'communications facilities' on remote islands, GCHQ in particular was able to preserve a far-reaching network that made British intelligence collection during this period still so effective. Not only did Britain run intercept posts in the Middle East and Africa, including from Aden, Bahrain, and Kenya, but it also provided space for American signals intelligence bases at the same time, including in Mauritius, and Cyprus.¹² This was even more noteworthy, given the manner in which GCHQ was affected by the decolonisation process; Easter asserts that 'as the empire melted away, GCHQ's own empire of overseas signals intelligence stations also faced dissolution'. Owing to a combination of broader British budgetary problems, cuts in defence spending and the closure of bases east of Suez, this jeopardised GCHQ's intelligence collection, by impacting upon the agency's technical capability, thus removing a layer of security for the posts.¹³ Bases rights granted to Britain in the first flush of independence in countries such as Ceylon or Iraq, later became easy targets for nationalist politicians, and some were closed retrospectively.

Yet, more stable locations such Cyprus and Hong Kong, together with remote islands such as Diego Garcia and Ascension Island, allowed intelligence to outlast the transition to Commonwealth.¹⁴ A notable consensus exists amongst several intelligence historians as to the power of Britain's 'residual imperial footholds'; Aldrich argues that such territories were what enabled British intelligence power to outlast the 'End of Empire', whilst for Easter, GCHQ's 'greatest asset' were the listening posts 'beyond Europe which exploited the global reach of the British Empire'.¹⁵ The

¹⁰ Easter, 'GCHQ and British External Policy in the 1960s', p. 692.

¹¹ Private information.

¹² Easter, 'GCHQ and British External Policy in the 1960s', p. 686.

¹³ Ibid, pp. 686-688.

¹⁴ P.R. Keefe, *Chatter: Uncovering the ECHLEON Surveillance Network and the Secret World of Global Eavesdropping*, (London 2006).

¹⁵ Easter, 'GCHQ and British External Policy in the 1960s', p. 683.

following section sketches out the scope of Britain's intelligence collection across Asia in the mid-1950s to early 1960s, in order to demonstrate the resilience of Britain's intelligence connections. Furthermore, it places emphasis upon the Anglo-American dimension of intelligence activity in Asia during this period, in order to demonstrate the manner in which, in light of the broader foreign policy divergences outlined above, intelligence was both source *and* solution to tensions in the Special Intelligence Relationship.

China, Hong Kong, and Taiwan

As discussed in the literature review, China, just as much as the Soviet Union, was a key 'driver' in US foreign policy during the second half of the twentieth century. China palpably lay at the heart of broader disagreements between Britain and the US as to the management of adversaries and the risks of real military involvement in Asia. Rooted in the strategic thought of British Prime Ministers from Attlee to Wilson, Britain continually concerned itself with the possibility of US entanglement in the wrong kind of war in Asia – one that could lead to conventional warfare, and eventually, the use of atomic weapons. Furthermore, the British and Americans were unable to overcome fundamental differences in the way that they perceived of Chinese Communism; whilst Washington held a strong tendency to regard Communism as a monolithic movement, reducing China to an appendage of the Soviet Union's ambitions, Britain held onto a much more pragmatic view of Beijing, paying greater attention to the power dynamics and actors at play, ultimately believing that the Communists would retain control over the Chinese mainland in the long-term. This resulted in the sharpest policy difference, in which political, financial, and broader strategic interests in Asia pushed Whitehall to adopt a more conciliatory approach to the Chinese regime, including official recognition.¹⁶

¹⁶ P. Lowe, *Containing the Cold War in East Asia: British Policies towards Japan, China and Korea, 1948-53*, (Manchester, 1997); Xia Yafeng, *Negotiating with the Enemy: US-China Talks during the Cold War, 1949-1972*, (Indiana, 2006).

In intelligence terms, this undoubtedly translated into tensions between SIS and its American counterpart, the CIA. In line with America's more interventionist stance towards Asian affairs, this manifested itself especially over the CIA's prioritisation of covert action over traditional intelligence gathering - a legacy of its wartime OSS heritage - particularly as this tended towards pseudo-military engagement and sabotage in British territories. Frank Wisner, the first head of American covert action had brought in many military officials seconded from Army units, thus contributing towards somewhat of a 'commando culture'.¹⁷ This clashed with the British SIS approach, which subordinated action to intelligence gathering in a re-organisation in 1945. Moreover, SIS had enjoyed close relations with the Chinese Communists throughout the Second World War. Nonetheless, all this did not inhibit intelligence sharing with the Americans. Between 1943 and 1947, GCHQ intercept high-grade traffic passing between Moscow and the Russian Mission in Yunnan, passing this onto its American counterparts as early as 1946.¹⁸

Britain and American's policy differences were even more pronounced in Hong Kong and Taiwan. Hong Kong became a key battleground not only for the CIA and SIS, but a host of other Chinese and foreign intelligence agencies, all of which grappled for the Chinese mainland in some way. The Anglo-American Special Intelligence Relationship grew particularly terse owing to the America's covert activities in Hong Kong, including sponsorship of anti-Communist groups in the colony, as well as considerable propaganda efforts through the United States Information Agency. As shall be seen in the case study chapter on Hong Kong, both agencies operated out of the American Consulate-General in Hong Kong, committed to countering Beijing's influence in internal developments there. Resulting in claims that the British were not doing enough to clamp down on Beijing, this proved to be a key source of friction with the British, who sought not to provoke Beijing or to inflame already tense political relations with the colony. As early as 1951, the British psychological operations liaison officer with Washington was asked to look into the US Information

¹⁷ Richard J. Aldrich, *The Hidden Hand: Britain, America, and Cold War Secret Intelligence*, (London, 2002), pp. 294-5.

¹⁸ Aid, 'The Russian Target: The U.K.-U.S. Cryptologic Effort Against the Soviet Union, 1945-1960', paper presented to the Annual Conference of the Society of Historians of American Foreign Relations, Washington DC, 6-8 June 2003, pp. 22-9.

Service's links 'with covert activities' in Hong Kong, forcing the Americans to attempt to 'smooth over British suspicions' through some rather fraudulent claims.¹⁹

The dynamics from Hong Kong rippled into Taiwan, exacerbating tensions. Convinced that Beijing had developed an extensive reach into Hong Kong through infiltrating businesses, trade unions, schools, and even the media, America used the CIA to actively finance Taiwan's anti-Communist groups in Hong Kong. This created a substantial rift with the British; Hong Kong Governor Alexander Graham was intolerant of Taiwan (and other) clandestine groups utilising Hong Kong to stage subversive activities, to the point that the British went about dismantling these actors, and arresting their leaders – by August 1951, eight undercover operatives from Taiwan were in custody.²⁰ However, as the Nationalist-Communist conflict escalated, so too did subversive activity in Hong Kong. Both sides exchanged fire over the then Nationalist-held islands of Kinmen and Mazu, drawing America further into supporting the Nationalists.²¹

Remarkably, in April 1955, the Taiwanese secret service arranged for the bombing of an Air India airliner, 'The Kashmir Princess', which was carrying Chinese Communist journalists to the Bandung Conference in Indonesia. The bomb was planted as the plane refuelled in Hong Kong, and later went off, killing all on board, though not its presumed target – Chinese Foreign Minister Zhou Enlai, who was meant to be on board, but changed his mind at the last minute. Consequently, tensions flared between the British and Communist Chinese security organisations, in which the Indians had to serve as a buffer.²² Taiwan continued to be a source of friction well into the 1960s, acknowledged by the then CIA Head of Station in Hong Kong, Peer de Silva, who stated that Special Branch in Hong Kong were aware of the CIA's connection to the Taiwanese service, acknowledged in the fact that

¹⁹ US National Archives, RG 59, Box 38 Martin, 'Use of Hong Kong USIS as Cover for Covert Operations', 17th December 1952, Office of Chinese Affairs, P Files, 1953-5; Box 17 (draft) National Security Council 48/2, 9th February 1950, Office of Chinese Affairs.

²⁰ Johannes R. Lombardo, 'A Mission of Espionage, Intelligence, and Psychological Operations: The American Consulate in Hong Kong, 1949-64', p. 70.

²¹ G.H. Chang and He Di, 'The Absence of War in the US-China Confrontation over Quemoy and Matsu in 1954-1955: Contingency, Luck, Deterrence,' *The American Historical Review*, 98:5 (1993), pp. 1500-1524.

²² TNA, PREM 11/1309, Graham (Hong Kong) to Lennox-Boyd (London), 20th May 1955.

they often came to him with complaints about their activities.²³ In de Silva's words, the situation was one of 'never-ending burlesque, except that people did die performing it'.²⁴

Burma

The competition that characterised sabotage and subversion along China's borders formed the backdrop to similar covert activity in Burma. Although both Britain and the United States feared Burma's loss to the Communists, again, the Americans took a much more interventionist approach to influencing the Burmese political landscape. In 1949, at the end of the Chinese Civil War, some Nationalist forces had escaped into Northern Burma. Providing the Chinese Nationalist warlord, General Li Mi, and his Kuomintang forces with considerable support, the CIA sought to distract Chinese forces from Korea with pinprick raids in the south, partly in line with the ideas of US defence officials in the Pentagon. Within American circles, this controversial plan was kept confined to President Truman and the National Security Council, and presumably, the British too.²⁵ Similar operations were launched from India with a focus on Tibet.²⁶

These American-backed operations were a real source of friction not only with the British in Hong Kong, but also with French officials in Hanoi. With a much greater focus on Burma's internal dynamics, both countries were aware that US operations not only threatened retaliation from the Chinese Communists, but also risked worsening Burma's already fragile domestic instability. The French High Commissioner (and Commander-in-Chief in Indochina) had expressed his frustration with these groups to British and American intelligence his frustration with such groups, and that he was 'imprisoning every Chinese nationalist he could get his hands on'.²⁷ Moreover, from the British perspective, fears that Burma would fall into internal chaos also dashed any hopes that it might have

²³ Peer De Silva, *Sub Rosa: The CIA and the Uses of Intelligence*, (New York, 1978), pp. 194-5.

²⁴ Ibid.

²⁵ Ralph E. Weber, *Spymasters: Ten CIA Officers in Their Own Words*, (Wilmington, 1999), p. 119.

²⁶ M. Dunham, *Buddha's Warriors: the Story of the CIA-backed Tibetan Freedom Fighters, the Chinese Invasion, and the Ultimate Fall of Tibet*, (London, 2005); J.K. Knaus, *Orphans of the Cold War: America and the Tibetan Struggle for Survival*, (New York, 2008).

²⁷ Aldrich, *Hidden Hand*, pp. 298-9.

had of drawing Burma back into the Commonwealth. These tensions culminated at an intelligence conference in 1952, in which British officers openly confronted their American counterparts over their covert operation, delineating their threat to Burma, and more broadly, to regional stability through the risk of provoking China into an attack. Although the Americans refused discussion of the matter, they eventually agreed to keep Britain better informed of their operations involving Kuomintang rebels in Burma, and by 1960 were using the CIA's private air force to fly Nationalist fighters from Burma to Taiwan.²⁸

India

India's strategic value as a potential counterbalance to China rendered it another key node in the Special Intelligence Relationship in Asia. Significantly, in the post-war period, and later into the Cold War, intelligence activity in India was indicative of broader political relationship dynamics as they related to empire. India's ties with Anglo-American intelligence within its territory were complex; an underlying aversion to such agencies stemmed from Britain's imperial past. India's new rulers had been subjected to years of surveillance by Britain's secret services. Therefore, as McGarr argues, by the time the British had retreated from the subcontinent in 1947, its manipulation of the Indian political system had left behind a political paradigm 'rife with paranoia and conspiracy'.²⁹ However, with European decolonisation across the continent, both Indian and Pakistani policymakers eventually came to establish clandestine partnerships with both British and American intelligence agencies. Though purporting to value India's strategic position as a bulwark against Communism in the region, in reality, Britain and the United States developed an intelligence presence in India because of its

²⁸ Ibid.

²⁹ Paul McGarr, 'Tinker, Tailor, Soldier, Subversive: India, Pakistan and the Cultural Politics of Cold War Intelligence', in Elizabeth Leake and Leslie James, (eds.), *Decolonisation and the Cold War: Negotiating Independence*, (London, 2015), p. 285.

strategic location near to the Soviet Union, China, and Persian oilfields. In fact, by the mid-1960s, this had even attracted attention from Soviet foreign intelligence.³⁰

Imperialism cast a shadow over all intelligence relations with India. Rooted in the East India Company's network of indigenous spies, political informants, and propagandists it co-opted to safeguard British interests in the eighteenth century, Britain had a substantial presence in India well into the twentieth century.³¹ Despite having once controlled India – and suppressed South Asian nationalism – following Indian independence, Britain sought to continue cultivating its relationship there, seeking to preserve its own interests in the region. As McGarr has argued, Britain's intelligence interest in India stemmed not only from seeking to create a barrier to Communism, but also to strategically align India with the West, as well as to demonstrate to the US its worth as an international partner. Whilst SIS established a station in India in the late 1940s, much to the displeasure of the British High Commissioner there, it was really MI5, with its extensive SLO network stretching across all of Britain's empire that provided Britain's core intelligence link. Stationed with the intention of providing security advice to local governments, the SLOs acted as a conduit for the exchange of information between London and Britain's imperial outposts.³² Whilst MI5 enjoyed 'notably close' relations with India's intelligence service, the Intelligence Bureau, owing to various factors - most notably India's aversion to foreign intelligence activity - SIS's interactions with them were characterised as 'prickly and often adversarial' in nature. The Foreign Office's Information Research Department, which conducted a secret information offensive, also boasted of a substantial covert presence in India, having built substantial relationships with independent research centres in India to disseminate British propaganda, as well as Indian government departments.³³

The CIA's experience in India was rather more tempestuous. Seeking to emulate the intimate relationship that MI5 held with the Indian Intelligence Bureau, Presidents Eisenhower and Kennedy sought to develop an intelligence presence in India, regarding it as a 'crucial strategic counterweight'

³⁰ Paul McGarr, 'Quiet Americans in India': The CIA and the Politics of Intelligence in Cold War South Asia', *Diplomatic History*, 38:5 (2014), p. 1062. By the mid-1960s, the KBG had devoted operational resources towards India.

³¹ McGarr, 'Tinker, Tailor, Soldier, Subversive', p. 285.

³² Ibid, p. 288.

³³ McGarr, 'Quiet Americans in India', pp. 1053, 1060.

to Communism.³⁴ However, as this relationship grew under the auspices of the CIA, Tibet proved to be a real thorn in America's side. Utilising Indian airspace for sponsored resistance operations in Chinese-controlled Tibet, as well as support to the Indo-Tibetan Special Frontier Force, the CIA also oversaw the establishment of nuclear-powered surveillance equipment in two of India's Himalayan peaks, for atomic intelligence on China.³⁵

Into the 1950s, however, this relationship eroded owing to a damaging mix of political issues. As airdrops and commando activity provoked a Chinese backlash, America's 1953 security agreement with Pakistan threw the Indian relationship into jeopardy. Furthermore, the Communist defeat of the Tibetan Army (and subsequent expulsion of the Indian diplomatic mission from Lhasa) led to an Indian withdrawal of assistance to Tibet, forcing the CIA to suspend its operations there.³⁶ Additionally, the arrival of Nehru as Indian premier, followed by an explosive series of revelations in the Indian press of CIA activity – and penetration of the highest levels of Indian government – damaged relations even further. American sentiment at the situation was exemplified in CIA Director Richard Helm's fury at the disclosure in the *Washington Post* of a commentary by former director Galbraith, concerning the CIA's operational remit in India, which conceded that some activities were known to 'conflict' with Indian local authorities. In Helm's words, this, like other press reports before it, had 'raised unshirted hell in India'.³⁷

Britain's main problem in India was, by contrast, impecuniosity. The last MI5 officer in India was withdrawn in the late 1960s, owing to 'sweeping cuts' forced upon the Security Service by London, which sought savings overseas to relieve the financial burden on Britain's economy at home.³⁸ As McGarr observes, although the British intelligence presence in its former colony attracted 'far less political opprobrium' than its American counterparts, this reflected, to some extent, upon

³⁴ Ibid, p. 1051.

³⁵ Thomas Laird, *Into Tibet: the CIA's First Atomic Spy and His Secret Expedition to Lhasa*, (New York, 2003).

³⁶ McGarr, 'Quiet Americans in India', pp.1051-5.

³⁷ McGarr, 'Tinker, Tailor, Soldier, Subversive', p. 291.

³⁸ Ibid, p. 288.

Britain's waning international influence and 'increasingly junior role' alongside its American partner.³⁹

Indonesia

All nationalist leaders in post-war Asia were intelligence targets. On 11th July 1947, an MI5 officer paid a visit to Lord Killearn, Britain's most senior official in Asia. He confessed that they had been opening letters between Nehru and Sukarno, Indonesia's popular nationalist leader, as they passed through Singapore. On this occasion, they had ripped one of the envelopes in their efforts and did not know what to do. Killearn recorded that it has been 'very clumsily tampered with' and while he was fascinated by the contents of the long letter, he also complained of 'bungling' by the security agencies, declaring it overall to be 'very clumsy and rather unwise'. He agonised over the possibility of banning MI5 from 'tampering or opening any such high level communications' in future.⁴⁰

Sukarno was of no less interest than Nehru because of the complex relationships between Britain, Malaysia, Singapore, Brunei and Indonesia. In the 1950s, the peculiar dynamics of cooperation, exchange, and ultimately, subversion, continued to plague the Special Intelligence Relationship in Indonesia. In 1958, Britain and America backed separatist rebels in Indonesia's vast island chain. Thereafter, Indonesia replied with what was known as the 'Confrontation'. This was an undeclared war between Britain, Malaysia, and Indonesia, in which Indonesia attempted to break up the Malaysian Federation, Indonesia sponsored a guerrilla movement against the British, who covertly backed the Malaysians. The eventual deposal of Indonesia leader Sukarno and subsequent changes that took place in Indonesia in 1965 were of such importance that Easter has labelled them 'a watershed into the history of Southeast Asia, and a major reverse for Communism in the Cold War'.⁴¹

³⁹ Ibid, p. 296.

⁴⁰ Entry for 11th July 1947, Killearn Diary, Middle East Centre, St Anthony's College Oxford. The local branch of MI5 was Security Intelligence Far East or SIFE.

⁴¹ David Easter, 'Keep the Indonesian Pot Boiling': Western Covert Intervention in Indonesia, October 1965-March 1966', *Cold War History*, 5:1 (2005), p. 55.

Whilst America did involve itself in the conflict to subvert the Communist cause in Indonesia – indeed, UK Prime Minister Wilson played upon American fears of Sukarno’s increasing collaboration with the Chinese, to entice American support - the same policy divergences that echoed across Asia between Britain and the United States reverberated through Indonesia.⁴² President Kennedy disagreed with Britain’s tough stance in the Confrontation, seeking to arrive at some sort of *modus vivendi* with Sukarno owing to Indonesia’s strategic position regionally. Moreover, according to Easter, London regarded American diplomatic efforts to persuade Sukarno as ‘tantamount to appease’, and therefore sought to ‘rein in Washington’, convincing it of Indonesia’s hostility towards Malaysia.⁴³ Furthermore, as Jones observes, British efforts to elicit American involvement over covert action in Indonesia need to be regarded within the broader context of Macmillan’s determination to repair the Special Relationship, following the earlier Suez crisis.⁴⁴

The death of Kennedy in 1963 offered an opportunity for a fresh appeal by London to Washington for support against Sukarno. Indeed, with somewhat indecent haste they began this effort while attending Kennedy’s funeral. Central to this appeal was British use of intelligence gathered from Indonesia. In his extensive research on the Confrontation, Easter points to two main forms of intelligence the British were able to draw upon, not only to inform British policymakers and the military, but also their American counterparts: human and signals intelligence. In human intelligence terms, Britain had agents within both the Indonesia government and military, supplemented by intelligence derived from indigenous border peoples, interrogations of prisoners, and captured documents.⁴⁵ The SIS effort was led by John Colvin, described as the ‘architect of the more deniable aspects of an undeclared war’.⁴⁶ SIS was key in this regard; such was its reach in Indonesia that at one critical stage in Britain’s assessment of Sukarno’s health, the service had even managed to obtain X-

⁴² R.J Aldrich and R. Cormac, *The Black Door: Spies Secret Intelligence and Prime Ministers* (London, 2016), pp. 221, 267.

⁴³ David Easter, ‘British Intelligence and Propaganda during the ‘Confrontation’, 1963-1966, *Intelligence and National Security*, 16:2 (2001), p. 86.

⁴⁴ Jones, ‘Maximum Disavowable Aid’, p. 1179.

⁴⁵ Easter, ‘British Intelligence and Propaganda during the ‘Confrontation’, pp. 84-85.

⁴⁶ Aldrich and Cormac, *The Black Door*, pp. 264-73.

ray scans of Sukarno when he was admitted for kidney stones, as well as his medical specialist's recommendations!⁴⁷

Furthermore, GCHQ provided Britain with a strong source of signals intelligence from its bases in Malaysia and Australia. There is evidence from a range of government documents that suggest London had broken Indonesian cyphers, whilst air photo reconnaissance from clandestine overhead flights was a source of information on border areas, airfields, guerrilla infiltration bases, and even Indonesian military deployments. Britain also waged a substantial propaganda effort, conducted in part by SIS and the Army, but mostly through the Foreign Office's IRD.⁴⁸ Whilst Easter is careful to note that intelligence and propaganda 'were not in themselves war-winning weapons',⁴⁹ they lent enough credibility and confidence to the British effort to enable them to depose Sukarno with the assistance of the Americans. Furthermore, despite broader policy divergence, Indonesia led to a baseline level of Anglo-American intelligence cooperation; one result of a meeting to gain American support resulted in the establishment of various working groups – one devoted to Indonesia - intended to formalise cooperation through the production of joint Anglo-American intelligence assessments, thus institutionalising collaboration.⁵⁰

As can be seen, secret intelligence became an increasingly important component in international relations in the twentieth century, and a vital tool in prosecuting the Cold War in Asia through covert action. Cooperation was a vital part of intelligence success, with the British-American Special Relationship the most important example. Yet, the US-UK arrangement reached what Jeffreys-Jones has called its 'Churchillian apogee' in the 1940s and 1950s. By the 1960s, there were signs of change. A generation of leaders who had fought the Second World War together was passing. Moreover, tensions in American society, challenges to US foreign policy including the Vietnam War, vicious disagreements over issues such as the 1973 Middle East Crisis, together with a decline in British capabilities, did not destroy the Anglo-American intelligence relationship, but they raised questions over it. For those who wished to sustain the Anglo-American intelligence relationship in

⁴⁷ Easter, 'British Intelligence and Propaganda during the 'Confrontation'', p. 86.

⁴⁸ Ibid, pp. 91-93.

⁴⁹ Ibid, p. 99.

⁵⁰ Jones, 'Maximum Disavowable Aid', pp. 1194-1195.

Asia, the watchtowers provided by British outposts at Hong Kong, Hanoi and Peking could not have been more important.⁵¹

⁵¹ R. Jeffreys-Jones, 'The End of an Exclusive Special Intelligence Relationship: British-American Intelligence Co-operation Before, During and After the 1960s', *Intelligence and National Security*, 27:5 (2012), pp. 707-21.

The Watchtower:
British Intelligence in Hong Kong

Located on China's periphery, Hong Kong's advantageous position lent it a huge strategic value in intelligence gathering terms. Historically, overseas representation in the British colony had brought tangible benefits including direct economic value through foreign exchange earnings and trade, which the British in particular sought to preserve through their presence in Hong Kong. As the European Empires found themselves amidst the throes of decolonisation, increasing attention was directed towards the Far Eastern sphere as a key theatre for intelligence gathering activity.

Whilst the Soviet strategic nuclear threat had previously been Britain's top intelligence priority, as Lord Mountbatten, Chief of the Defence Staff affirmed, 'China also became a major area of interest' into the 1960s, earning the status of 'a first priority target' with the Joint Intelligence Committee (JIC) in London. Such was its importance that in 1966, the JIC even discussed re-orienting resources from the Soviet Bloc towards China instead, with the latter described as a 'growth target'.¹ In the post-war period, and certainly later at the height of the Cold War, having a sizeable human presence in the British colony enabled 'China-watchers' of various intelligence services to monitor the degree of rapid - even chaotic - political change China underwent under Maoist rule. Moreover, it also allowed them to assess Chinese military developments, with an eye to the tense Sino-Soviet rivalry that dominated geopolitics across Asia during the Cold War. Located well to the south, Hong Kong also facilitated some monitoring of Southeast Asia during the Vietnam War.

¹ David Easter, 'GCHQ and British External Policy in the 1960s', *Intelligence and National Security*, 23:5 (2008), p. 689.

Yet, as with other parts of its empire in the mid-twentieth century, Britain struggled to contain the nationalist tide that swept across China. The British presence in Hong Kong experienced an increasingly violent existence into the 1960s; characterised by strikes, protests and violent attacks in the centre of the colony, and a notorious bombing campaign that the British sought to downplay, this culminated in series of riots in 1967, as anti-British sentiment increased in intensity in step with the radicalism of the Cultural Revolution on the mainland. Nonetheless, for London, retaining its grip on the colony had clear benefits, above all when it came to intelligence collection. Noting the ‘invaluable’ nature of Hong Kong as a base for intelligence activities, the Foreign Office pointed to the utility of the colony ‘as a listening post and staging point’, above all given the rapidly changing situation in Southeast Asia.² In fact, such was Hong Kong’s strategic importance that the Foreign Office observed even China seemed to have ‘swallowed their ideological pride’ with regard to Hong Kong and accepted that they were hosting a ‘flourishing colonial society’ so close to the Chinese mainland, given the extensive benefits that Hong Kong brought.³ Underpinned by consultations in the Foreign Office in 1969 about designating an exclusive ‘China-watching’ role, the discussions opened with the statement that Hong Kong was ‘the best source of information outside China about affairs in China’.⁴ Such sentiment was not confined to the British either; discussing the ‘special advantage’ not shared by other British diplomatic posts, James Murray, Head of the Far East Department, underlined Hong Kong’s ‘continuing value as a reservoir’ of expertise on developments in China, ‘attested by the fact that so many foreign governments have chosen to send China watchers to their Consular posts in the colony’.⁵ Meeting over cocktails at diplomatic receptions, this growing band of observers constituted a multi-national university seminar on the volatile events in China in the 1960s.⁶

Yet, at the same time, Hong Kong was also the backdrop to a different, emerging dynamic between intelligence allies, complicated by the plethora of intelligence organisations operating - and

² T[he] N[ational] A[rchives], FCO 40/316, Far Eastern Department (FCO) ‘Background Note: Visit of the Parliamentary Under-Secretary, Mr. Royle, to Hong Kong: Chinese Policy Towards Hong Kong’, October 1970.

³ Ibid.

⁴ TNA, FCO 21/494, FED (London) to Tomlinson (London), ‘Consultations with the Governor of HK: ‘China-watching’ in Hong Kong’, 25th November 1969.

⁵ TNA, FCO 21/494, Murray (London) to Maddocks (Hong Kong), 29th January 1969.

⁶ Private information,

competing - in Hong Kong. In addition to the British SIS station in Hong Kong, and GCHQ's post in Little Sai Wan, and indeed various RAF electronic intelligence (elint) sites, Hong Kong hosted one of the largest CIA stations in Asia, housed within the US Consulate-General. The US lacked diplomatic representation in mainland China, its embassies and consulates having been forced to close in 1949 with the establishment of the People's Republic of China (PRC), which shifted the US to its peripheries in Hong Kong and Taiwan.⁷ The US did not recognise the PRC until the mid-1970s and so lacked a physical presence on the mainland for a quarter of a century. These changes in diplomatic relations had clear implications for intelligence collection. As Aid and Richelson have highlighted in their short survey of US intelligence gathering and China, 1949 was the 'beginning of the end of the US intelligence presence in China'. Having been formally asked by the State Department to withdraw all its personnel from China, CIA stations at Shanghai and Canton were consequently closed, and by September 1949, 'virtually all' CIA agent networks left in China were 'collapsed or destroyed' by the Chinese Communist security services.⁸

This had an important consequence in rendering the US Consulate-General 'one of the largest consulates in the world ... but with a more important function', owing to the CIA's presence.⁹ Intelligence gathering at the Consulate-General was not confined to CIA officers alone - the Consulate's political and economic sections, and military liaison officers were all involved in cultivating sources in Hong Kong, and extracting information from Chinese language newspapers.¹⁰ Although this lent itself well to intelligence exchange, the Americans' presence also raised considerable tensions between the two countries; Hong Kong's value to the Americans was also about conducting sabotage operations, encapsulated in Frank Wisner's comment to Kim Philby that 'whenever there is somewhere we want to destabilise, the British have an island nearby'.¹¹ From the

⁷ Chi-kwan Mark, 'American 'China Hands' in the 1950s', in Cindy Yik-yi Chu (eds.), *Foreign Communities in Hong Kong, 1840s-1950s*, (Basingstoke, 2005), p. 173.

⁸ Matthew Aid and Jeffrey T. Richelson, 'US Intelligence and China: Collection, Analysis, and Covert Action', p. 3. On the early CIA stations in China see Yu Maochun, *OSS in China: Prelude to Cold War* (New Haven, 1997), pp. 294-348.

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ Johannes R. Lombardo, 'A Mission of Espionage, Intelligence, and Psychological Operations: The American Consulate in Hong Kong, 1949-64', *Intelligence and National Security*, 14:4 (1999), p. 66.

¹¹ Philby, *My Silent War*, p.117.

American perspective, Hong Kong was a 'springboard' to China - it offered opportunities to ideologically convert the Chinese, economic opportunities to exploit, and political interests to protect.¹²

The tensions were early to manifest themselves; whilst Britain was anxious to preserve its longstanding commercial interests and to protect Hong Kong, it sought to avoid provoking China. By contrast, the United States, which was already pursuing a rigid economic embargo of China, and lacked diplomatic representation in Beijing, could pursue a more aggressive approach in Hong Kong. As Lombardo has discussed, this stemmed from fundamental differences in approach to foreign relations with China during the Cold War, which anchored itself in different understandings of the Communist regime; whilst Britain believed the Chinese Communists would maintain control of the mainland in the long-term, economic and territorial interests suggested a conciliatory approach to Beijing was the more sensible course of action. By contrast, the US saw China's communist turn as a failure for the 'free world', and regarded Communism as a monolithic ideology; Maoist China was a satellite of the Soviet Union, which determined a much more belligerent policy for the US.¹³ Although this seemingly carved a path of divergence between the two allies, the UK nonetheless sought to balance the Special Relationship, through concessions in its regional foreign policy in Asia, such as supporting the US military effort in South Korea. Critically, Lombardo argues that this had a destabilising effect on Hong Kong; Britain's 'laissez-faire attitude' to governing Hong Kong effectively created space for the Americans to conduct intelligence gathering and covert activities directly from the colony.¹⁴

In fact, such was the delicate balance that Menzies, SIS chief in the 1950s, insisted that SIS personnel, and the CIA, kept 'at arm's length' in this 'sensitive spot', to the point that for a period, intelligence material was only allowed to be exchanged in Singapore, where the CIA had a much smaller station.¹⁵ Hong Kong was thus illustrative of broader tensions at play in the 'Special Relationship' between the United States and Britain. The Hong Kong government held 'serious

¹² Chi-Kwan, 'American 'China Hands' in the 1950s', p. 171.

¹³ Lombardo, 'The American Consulate in Hong Kong, 1949-64', p. 64.

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ J.B. Smith, *Portrait of a Cold Warrior*, (New York, 1976), pp. 147-8.

reservations' about the American activities in the colony, particularly concerning running agents, stemming from surprise raids conducted against Communist and Nationalist organisations earlier in the 1950s that uncovered covert contacts within the US Consulate-General.¹⁶ This was personified through officials such as Hong Kong Governor, Alexander Grantham, who was particularly averse to US intelligence in Hong Kong, at one point calling the CIA 'extremely ham-handed'. Tensions therefore stemmed from underlying fears that the US would turn Hong Kong into a base for subversion against China, as opposed to simply intelligence gathering. Indeed, there was considerable tension between the political and financial elite in Hong Kong, which prioritised stable relations with the mainland, and London, which was more inclined to accommodate the Americans.¹⁷

Whilst historians have written extensively about Britain and Hong Kong with regard to the decolonisation process, paying particular attention to the violent episode that gripped Hong Kong in 1967,¹⁸ substantially less coverage has been given to the intelligence aspects of Britain's presence in the colony. This is significant for two reasons: firstly, Britain's imperial roots in East and Southeast Asia meant that it had an established cadre of intelligence officers operating from its colonial outposts, such as Hong Kong with excellent language skills. Whilst much has been documented about its earlier operations, particularly during the Second World War,¹⁹ literature on the later operations of the SIS station in Hong Kong into the 1960s is noticeably thin, though it must be noted that this is due, in part, to the difficulty of accessing various archival files pertaining to the British government and Hong Kong on this period. Certainly, substantial pieces have been written on both American intelligence activities and covert action in Hong Kong, and yet, the literature remains quieter on British SIS activities or indeed the activities of Hong Kong's own Special Branch.

¹⁶ Chi-Kwan, 'American 'China Hands' in the 1950s', P. 177.

¹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸ See Gary Ka-Wai Cheung, *Hong Kong's Watershed – The 1967 Riots*, (Hong Kong, 2009); Richard Hughes, *Borrowed Place, Borrowed Time: Hong Kong and its Many Faces*, (London, 1976); Robert Bickers and Ray Yep (eds.), *May Days in Hong Kong: Riot and Emergency in 1967*, (Hong Kong, 2009).

¹⁹ See Andy Thomas, 'British Signals Intelligence after the Second World War', *Intelligence and National Security*, 3:4 (1988), pp. 103-110; Desmond Ball, 'Over and Out: Signals Intelligence (Sigint) in Hong Kong', *Intelligence and National Security*, 11:3 (1996), pp. 474-496; Richard Aldrich, *GCHQ: The Uncensored Story of Britain's Most Secret Intelligence Agency*, (London, 2010) also contains a section on Hong Kong; James Louis Hevia, *The Imperial Security State: British Colonial Knowledge and Empire-Building in Asia*, (Cambridge, 2012);

Secondly, Hong Kong was illustrative of what can be considered ‘transatlantic antagonism’ in the Special Relationship. As this chapter will endeavour to show, intelligence gathering by both Britain and the United States in the colony took place against a backdrop of constant tension between the allies. On the one hand, SIS and CIA intelligence was complementary; British material was able to fill in gaps on China where the CIA experienced shortcomings, particularly in terms of conducting interrogation and extracting information from travellers. On the other hand, the subversive activities of the CIA put it at odds with its British counterpart, creating a strain that reverberated at higher political levels. Nonetheless, this period demonstrated the utility of British intelligence collection from Hong Kong, underlining its status as ‘watchtower’ on mainland China, during an especially tense period in the Cold War in Asia.

Intelligence and chaos in Hong Kong

For much of the Cold War, the political and intelligence scene in Hong Kong was characterised by low level chaos. As Lombardo has emphasised, to the extent that the Cold War in Asia was a ‘recurring confrontation’ between the US and China, Hong Kong was very much the ‘battleground of ideological conflict’.²⁰ A key manner in which this manifested itself was through the sheer level of intelligence activity taking place within the colony. A myriad of Chinese, British, and American intelligence services (in addition to other nationalities such as the French) operated from Hong Kong, due to a combination of the ‘relative degree of openness’ in Hong Kong (contrasted with the Chinese mainland), which arguably facilitated the presence of so many foreign agents within the colony.²¹

However, it was the conflict between the Chinese Nationalists and Chinese Communists that was the key backdrop against which British and American intelligence gathering took place. The political struggle between the Communist Chinese, and the Kuomintang (KMT) Nationalist Chinese led to prolonged violent outbursts, culminating in terrorist campaigns, and the outbreak of civil unrest

²⁰ Lombardo, ‘The American Consulate in Hong Kong, 1949-64’, p. 64.

²¹ Ibid.

and riots in the 1950s and 1960s. For example, in April 1955, the KMT bombed an Air India aircraft carrying Chinese Communist journalists from China to the Bandung Conference in Indonesia, the explosion having occurred after the aircraft's refuelling in Hong Kong. Mao Zedong accused the British government of being responsible as it had warned the British Chargé d'Affaires in Beijing 'prior to the departure of the Indian aircraft ... that efforts would be made to sabotage the aircraft'.²² Moreover, according to Hong Kong Governor Alexander Grantham, the aircraft was supposed to be carrying Zhou Enlai, but Zhou's travel plans to the conference had been rescheduled at the last minute for fear of precisely this sort of event.²³ For Hong Kong, the international situation in the region therefore continually affected its internal stability.

Significantly, this was further complicated by the CIA's engagement with KMT Nationalists (and other anti-Communist organisations), as it sought to undermine the Chinese Communist regime. These groups engaged in numerous sabotage and guerrilla campaigns against the Communists in mainland China, as well as pro-Communist elements in Hong Kong. This proved to be a key source of antagonism for the British; not only was the American Consulate-General in Hong Kong using some KMT agents as sources of intelligence, but it also encouraged more violent activities. This contravened British law in the colony, which stated that no official agency, group, or organisation was 'to use the colony as an anti-Communist base'.²⁴ This stemmed from earlier British policy towards China in Hong Kong - having offered recognition to China in early 1950, Britain outlawed anti-Beijing activities that could be seen as provoking the People's Republic. For example, in one particular case in January 1951, the Hong Kong police arrested a KMT agent whom the Consul General considered 'one of the more respected contacts of the Consulate's Political Section'. To officials in the US State Department, the incident presented 'an example of the sensitiveness with which the British' viewed various American 'activities in Hong Kong'.²⁵

²² Steve Tsang, 'Target Zhou Enlai: The Kashmir Princess Incident of 1955', *China Quarterly*, 139 (1994): p. 766-82; Lombardo, 'The American Consulate in Hong Kong, 1949-64', p. 71.

²³ *Ibid.*

²⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 67.

²⁵ Walter McConaughy (Hong Kong) to State Department (Washington), No. 113, 'Arrest of Chinese Contact of Consulate General by Hong Kong Police', 15 February 1951, 746G.00/2-1551, RG 59, United States National Archives and Records Administration (NARA).

It was also seen as evidence of British suspicions of American intentions in Hong Kong.²⁶ Indeed, the British SIS was all too aware of the CIA's sponsored activities in Hong Kong; in the early 1950s, the CIA and its Nationalist allies in Chinese were remarkably active, conducting variants of guerrilla warfare, economic warfare, or propaganda against Beijing from locations as varied as Taiwan, Pakistan, India, Burma, Thailand, Laos, Japan, and Korea.²⁷ As Lombardo has shown, American operations expanded their scale significantly during the Eisenhower presidency from the mid-1950s onwards, in part due to the 1953 'Country Plan', which grew propaganda, intelligence, consular, and trade activities in Hong Kong. Although this was intended to 'foster the understanding and cooperation of British officials, businessmen, and Armed Forces',²⁸ in reality it stood in stark contrast to British objectives of not antagonising the Chinese regime. The tension mounted into the 1960s too. In discussions with the Americans, British suspicions surfaced; the Hong Kong authorities wanted Washington to pressure the KMT to cease its violent campaign, whilst they prosecuted Nationalist saboteurs, though without deporting them to Taiwan, as had previously been the case. The US, however, resisted, fearing the prosecution of Nationalist operations would lead to a subsequent loss of its principal intelligence sources on China.²⁹

It was worth reflecting upon just how extensive CIA involvement in anti-Beijing or pro-Nationalist operations was. In addition to Hong Kong, Taiwan was used as a particular base for launching operations.³⁰ In the 1950s, for example, the CIA conducted its activities through numerous cover organisations such as 'Western Enterprises Inc.' or the airline 'Civil Air Transport'.³¹ The CIA occasionally used operatives who were former Chinese prisoners of war; having been captured during the Korean War, they had chosen to be repatriated to Taiwan, rather than back to mainland China. They were used in various covert operations, which consisted primarily of either resistance missions in remote areas (to develop a long-term resistance movement), or commando raids, using flotillas of

²⁶ Lombardo, 'The American Consulate in Hong Kong, 1949-64', pp. 75-77.

²⁷ Richard J. Aldrich, *The Hidden Hand: Britain, America, and Cold War Secret Intelligence* (London, 2001), p. 295.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 67-70.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 77.

³⁰ Aid and Richelson, 'US Intelligence and China', p. 4.

³¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 26-27; William M. Leary, *Perilous Missions: Civil Air Transport and CIA Covert Operations in Asia*, (Alabama, 2006).

small attack boats against particular installations. Furthermore, the CIA, in agreement with American military chiefs, also embarked upon a programme of 'aggressive' clandestine raiding missions, launched from Taiwan. Targeting Chinese Communist communications and other installations, the operations were intended to keep the Communists 'off-balance', and crept into the realm of Western economic warfare through their detrimental impact upon China's coastal trade.³² It was this programme of raids that helped to trigger the First Taiwan Straits Crisis in August 1954.

However, this programme of covert warfare was hardly covert, and raised real tensions with the Chinese regime, which was keen to retaliate. The opportunity was raised in November 1952, when two CIA officers were captured on a mission in mainland China, in which CIA plans to collect an agent from Manchuria for debriefing were foiled: the original infiltration team had been captured and 'doubled' by communist forces, who instead ambushed the incoming C-47 aircraft with disguised anti-aircraft guns as it attempted to land, causing it to crash before reaching the collection point. Although the two pilots were killed, two CIA case officers - Richard G. Fecteau and John T. Downey - survived, only to be captured by the Chinese, and incarcerated for almost two decades until President Nixon was able to secure their release in 1971.³³ When finally released they were returned to the American via an RAF base in Hong Kong.³⁴

Furthermore, in addition to its covert operations, the US also ran an extensive psychological operations campaign in Hong Kong. Officially housed in the American Consulate-General, the United States Information Service (USIS) in Hong Kong, in collaboration with covert CIA operations, became a key means of disseminating anti-Communist propaganda across the region. Again, this was significant in exacerbating tensions with the British, as not only did American psychological operations reach mainland China, but they also targeted the overseas Chinese population. Not only did these operations attempt to destabilise the Communist regime, but they also sought to erode sympathy

³² Joint Chiefs of Staff, 1735/224, 'Coastal Raiding and Maritime Interdiction Operations (China)', 5 April 1954, Section 81, RG 218, NARA.

³³ Nicholas Dujmovic, 'Two CIA Prisoners in China, 1952-73: Extraordinary Fidelity', *Studies in Intelligence*, 50:4 (2006), pp. 21-36; Ralph W. McGehee, *Deadly Deceits: My 25 Years in the CIA*, (New York, 1983), p. 25; Ted Gup, *The Book of Honor: The Secret Lives and Deaths of CIA Operatives* (New York, 2007).

³⁴ Henry Kissinger, *Years of Upheaval* (Boston, 1982), p. 70

between the Chinese mainland and overseas population, thus targeting audiences across Asia. For example, one of USIS's most successful ventures was a *World Today* - a seemingly independent magazine published in Mandarin, which enjoyed a wide circulation in Taiwan and Southeast Asia.³⁵ Other secondary targets included any areas thought to be under threat from the Chinese Communists, and of course, the local population of Hong Kong.³⁶ Such operations therefore threatened the delicate balance that the British sought to preserve by not inflaming Chinese political sensitivities in Hong Kong.

Economic warfare proved to be another key area of confrontation provoked by the United States. Centring around on the Coordinating Committee for Multilateral Export Controls (COCOM) restrictions, a programme of Western economic blockade to Communist countries, issues over products imported from China into Hong Kong proper (or vice versa) were a regular source of friction between British and American officials in Hong Kong, and directly impacted upon Britain's approach to preserving trade with Hong Kong. Even during the Korean War, Britain had sought to resist such restrictions in order to enable exports and greater trade. Tensions certainly mounted into the 1950s, as US officials went to lengths to ensure trade regulations were appropriately enforced. At one point, US officials even rode along with British patrols intercepting smuggling boats in Hong Kong waters, effectively 'policing' the British in their own operations.³⁷

By the end of the 1950s, tensions ran high between the British and Americans, as the CIA's foray into covert operations and economic warfare threatened to undermine British policy towards the Chinese in Hong Kong. But why was it that the Americans were intervening to such a notable extent in Hong Kong? What was it exactly that they sought to achieve through their covert efforts? The explanation lay in their broader approach to the Cold War in Asia; with a watchful eye on the Communist regime in mainland China, the US sought to gain intelligence on pro-Nationalist groups in China and Hong Kong, particularly with regard to their efforts to retake power in the mainland, prospects for reunification with the Communists (or Nationalist resistance to reunification), and their

³⁵ Arthur W. Hummel, Jr., 13 July 1989, transcript, Foreign Affairs Oral History Project, Library of Congress, Washington, DC.

³⁶ Lombardo, 'The American Consulate in Hong Kong, 1949-64', p. 68.

³⁷ Aldrich, *The Hidden Hand*, pp. 308-309.

efforts to build a nuclear weapon.³⁸ The US was so averse to the notion of reunification between the Nationalists and Communists in the Chinese leadership, and this was reflected in the CIA's changing partnerships and quasi-alliances. For example, it did not immediately regard Chiang Kai-shek and the KMT as ideal partners. Noting the corrupt nature of the KMT regime, at one point, American 'China hands' considered creating a middle-of-the-road option that was also anti-Communist. This was envisaged to be an alternative to Chiang Kai-shek's corrupt KMT, and a better means of resisting regime consolidation in Beijing. This was not without controversy, however; some State Department officials considered this tantamount to treachery against Taiwan, despite other elements of the American establishment, such as Dean Rusk, preparing plans to depose Chiang Kai-shek using military, CIA, and KMT Army representatives.³⁹ This continued well into the late 1950s, and lay behind the US's reasons for running amok in Hong Kong, much to the chagrin of the British.

Failed networks and blind spots

As the CIA's covert activities grew in Hong Kong, so did Chinese suspicions. Inevitably, this proved to be another source of consternation between the Americans and British, above all when it implicated the latter through association or collusion. Beijing devoted considerable efforts to exposing both US covert activities and propaganda in Hong Kong. Using the press as an intermediary, the Communist regime issued stories of American spy rings attempting to influence the 'softer' aspects of Hong Kong life, such as education or culture, using them to 'poison the minds' of the Hong Kong population, and to 'carry out criminal activities' against China. Moreover, it correctly identified the efforts of the Asia Foundation, the Ford Foundation, and the Mercius Foundation to engage local schools with offers of grants, and to recruit graduate students as agents, with a view to sending them into mainland China. It

³⁸ Aid and Richelson, 'US Intelligence and China', pp. 1-4.

³⁹ Aldrich, *The Hidden Hand*, pp. 304-305.

also managed to identify American front organisations, including the Asian Film Company, established in 1954, and publishing houses such as the Asia Press Ltd., or Union Press Ltd.⁴⁰

This gathered pace in the late 1950s, as the Communist press in China (and the pro-Communist press in Hong Kong) grew particularly vehement in its accusations that the US Consulate-General in Hong Kong was a base for administering espionage, sabotage, and guerrilla warfare against China. This proved to be a real thorn in the side of the British, as the pro-Communist process accused the British of colluding with American operations, through various articles published in Hong Kong. For example, in December 1957, two Hong Kong newspapers, *Ta Kung Pao* and *Wen Hui Pao*, alleged that the American Consulate-General in Hong Kong was involved in KMT 'terrorist activities in and based in Hong Kong'. Additionally, pro-Communist daily newspapers accused the American Consulate of aiding the Chinese Nationalists in 'training agents and sending them to the mainland' to conduct espionage and sabotage. Such were the accusations that one newspaper even outrightly accused the Americans of having converted their 'listening post' into a base for assassinations, robbery, shipping arms, and training and despatching agents.⁴¹ Moreover, and illustrative of the extent to which Beijing had involved itself in countering US activities, an article in January 1958 in *Ta Kung Pao* attacked the size of the American Consulate-General, as surpassing the size of any embassy (including Moscow), and proceeded to accurately list all of the offices and agencies that were based in the Consulate-General.⁴²

At the outset of the 1960s, the Special Intelligence Relationship was thus already under strain in Hong Kong. Yet, this was to become exacerbated by additional constraints on the US's intelligence gathering capability. Throughout the 1950s, the CIA continually failed to successfully run agents or create clandestine networks in mainland China, its efforts described as 'a series of abysmal failures' by Aid and Richelson.⁴³ It must be noted that there were occasional agent successes, including predictions on China's decision to intervene in the Korean War, based on the stationing of PLA troops

⁴⁰ Ibid, pp. 310-311.

⁴¹ Lombardo, 'The American Consulate in Hong Kong, 1949-64', p. 74.

⁴² Ibid. See also G.D. Rawnsley, 'Taiwan's Propaganda Cold War: The Offshore Islands Crises of 1954 and 1958,' *Intelligence and National Security* 14:4 (1999), pp. 82-101.

⁴³ Aid and Richelson, 'US Intelligence and China', p. 3

on the Chinese border, which US signals intelligence had missed from its stations in Tokyo and Washington.⁴⁴ Nevertheless, despite these occasional successes, the majority of agent-insertion operations were futile. Demonstrative of the fruitless nature of the operations, between 1953 and 1955, as part of a CIA-funded project to build human intelligence (HUMINT) networks deep inside China, Chinese Nationalist transport aircraft were dropping two agents a month into the mainland. However, by late 1955, these agent insertion operations were deemed by the CIA to have been a complete failure; almost all of the agents were either captured, or killed shortly after landing. As the CIA's station chief in Taipei during 1958 to 1962 later observed, although the operations occasionally produced a useful piece of information, these were low-level - and not especially cost-effective - efforts, resulting overall in little intelligence.⁴⁵

Additionally, the CIA also worked with the Taiwanese to insert human agents into China through boat or by aircraft. However, these operations rapidly resulted in failure; labelled as an 'exercise in frustration', the relative inexperience of the CIA case officers running the programme harmed efforts severely. Combined with the 'sophisticated, multi-layered' Chinese internal security system, this raised too many obstacles for the CIA to successfully penetrate the Chinese mainland. According to Aid and Richelson, all evidence indicated that the CIA was unable to recruit any high-level agents within the Chinese government or military, or to operate 'for any significant period of time' networks of low-level agents on the mainland.⁴⁶ Despite warnings from the CIA, and even recommendations for the programme's discontinuation, including from the chief of the CIA's Clandestine Service Far East Division, the Chinese Nationalists insisted on sending more agents into the mainland, the numbers of which reached into the hundreds. The agents were simply sent to their deaths in China, rendering the operations of little intelligence value.⁴⁷

Yet, despite these clear setbacks, the scale of the programme - and its rate of failure - escalated into the 1960s. In 1962, President Kennedy allowed for the resumption of a range of covert

⁴⁴ Ibid, pp. 3-4.

⁴⁵ Ibid, pp. 4-5.

⁴⁶ Ibid, p. 2.

⁴⁷ Ibid, pp. 4-5. See also Tom Grunfeld, '" God We Had Fun": The CIA in China and Sino-American Relations,' *Critical Asian Studies*, 35:1 (2003), pp. 113-138.

action programmes to establish intelligence networks. Consisting of commando raids, sabotage operations, and agent parachute drops into China, particularly in Kwangtung Province near the border of North Vietnam, these operations were considerably large in scale, involving almost one thousand commandos. However, as with the operations staged throughout the 1950s, they rapidly resulted in defeat; almost one quarter of the commandos sent in were killed, and little information of intelligence value was produced. For example, in July 1963, a twenty-six man team of agents belong to the Anti-Communist National Salvation Corps was destroyed by North Vietnamese security forces, not long after landing on the coast of Quang Ninh Province. Although the CIA officially withdrew from the programme in 1964, also reducing the size of its station in Taipei, the Nationalists continued their programme unabated.⁴⁸ Collectively, what these failed operations demonstrated was the way in which China had become somewhat of a quagmire US intelligence.

The CIA's ability to penetrate Chinese internal security was visibly limited, and had hampered the US's efforts to understand Chinese society as it underwent fundamental change. Although the US Consulate-General in Hong Kong had absorbed many of the US Foreign Service's more experienced Sinologists, many of whom had been ejected from mainland China,⁴⁹ its reach outside of Hong Kong was still severely limited. As Chi-Kwan has noted, social interactions between Americans and local Chinese were restricted at best, confined to contact with the Chinese staff within the US Consulate-General, and members of the Chinese elite in Hong Kong.⁵⁰ The CIA - and particularly its Clandestine Service - had thus failed to penetrate the Bamboo Curtain.⁵¹ The consequences of not having sufficient human sources were clear for both the American foreign policy establishment and intelligence community in Washington; in addition to making the US rely more greatly upon technical intelligence, it also placed greater weight upon Hong Kong as a 'watchtower' from outside China and the possibility of interviewing refugees or visitors there, as well as running agents.

⁴⁸ Aid and Richelson, 'US Intelligence and China', pp. 29-30.

⁴⁹ Aldrich, *The Hidden Hand*, p. 306.

⁵⁰ Chi-Kwan, 'American 'China Hands' in the 1950's', p. 186.

⁵¹ Aid and Richelson, 'American Intelligence in China', p. 2.

Importantly, there were parallels in this field when it came to US signals intelligence gathering (SIGINT). The US also made efforts to expand its sigint capabilities in Asia during the 1950s; during the Cold War, it established a network of radar aerals and electronic posts around the edge of Hong Kong, whilst in 1956, as part of the NSA's COMINT Communications Relay System, it set up a station in Hong Kong proper, which was linked with sigint activities in Japan, Formosa, Thailand, and Guam.⁵² The US was also able to glean a considerable volume of SIGINT intercepts through a vast US Army site in Okinawa, Japan. Following the Korean War, when sigint had been poor, the US had allocated more resources towards deciphering Chinese codes, though it still struggled to make progress with higher-level traffic.⁵³ From Okinawa, the US read Chinese en clair messages, which yielded background information on the state of the Chinese economy, transportation, and logistics, and even pieces of information on the movements of military units inside China - information that was difficult to obtain in such a restricted, security state. It was also able to gain diplomatic SIGINT, reading the communications of other diplomats from smaller countries with weaker cyphers to their respective governments, over matters such as Chinese Premier Zhou Enlai.⁵⁴

However, as with the HUMINT networks, this form of American intelligence collection was also fraught with problems. By 1955, the US was still negotiating for new SIGINT sites in Asia, looking to Taiwan to establish an 'aerial farm' from which to intercept communications in the region.⁵⁵ However, against the backdrop of clashes between the US and Communist China over the Taiwan Straits in the late 1950s, the US found much difficulty in securing the site. Moreover, expanding American SIGINT arrangements in Hong Kong proved difficult when it came to the British. As US intelligence requirements rose steeply with the onset of the Korean War and the US sought to send greater numbers of US Air Force SIGINT units to Hong Kong (approximately eight hundred officers), the US encountered stiff resistance from the Hong Kong Governor, Alexander Grantham, who had become extremely averse - even hostile - to the myriad of intelligence activities

⁵² Ball, 'Over and Out', p. 478.

⁵³ Matthew M. Aid, 'American Comint in the Korean War (part ii): From the Chinese Intervention to the Armistice,' *Intelligence and National Security*, 15:1 (2000), pp. 14-49.

⁵⁴ Aid and Richelson, 'US Intelligence and China', pp. 8-9.

⁵⁵ Aldrich, *The Hidden Hand*, p. 400.

taking place within Hong Kong's territory. Moreover, real estate for sigint, a land-hungry activity was hard to come by and even GCHQ's activities had to be accommodated by terracing precipitous coastal areas.⁵⁶

Hong Kong's own government not only looked upon the activities of the CIA and NSA with scepticism, but were also lukewarm about the British agencies. When visiting Hong Kong for intelligence conferences, senior British intelligence officials felt they were in a foreign country somehow half-way between Britain and China, rather than a British colony and place where the local security officials had their own way of doing things, not unlike the intelligence services of India before 1947. Nevertheless, they were not without humour: on one occasion in the 1970s when the British agencies visited in some strength and were billeted incognito in a hotel in the centre of Hong Kong, MI5 officers were nevertheless all placed on the fifth floor, MI6 on the sixth floor and GCHQ on the eighth floor, reflecting their military designation as MI8.⁵⁷

Hong Kong therefore raised several complex dynamics within and between the two allies when it came to intelligence gathering. Whilst, on the one hand, a strong degree of cooperation existed between the US and UK, on the other hand, the CIA's array of covert activities was a constant source of tension with the British, bordering on hostility. Involving itself in the conflict between Chinese Nationalists and Communists, the destabilising nature of its operations ran contrary to the delicate balance the British sought to preserve with regard to the Chinese regime. Moreover, lacking diplomatic representation in mainland China, at the outset of the 1960s, the US found itself facing numerous holes in its intelligence gathering capacity regarding China. The value of Hong Kong as a listening post thus rested upon an uneasy intelligence alliance between the British and Americans.

British Intelligence and the Residue of Empire

⁵⁶ Ibid, pp. 400-1. Also private information.

⁵⁷ Private information.

Britain's advantage gathering intelligence in Asia was firmly rooted in its legacy of empire across the continent. Although the UK and US clashed on foreign policy terms regarding China, drawing on former imperial territories meant that Britain could provide a source of intelligence unparalleled by the Americans. In human intelligence terms, Britain has a 'long-established network of agents and contacts, often established through commercial conduits', as well as staff with a lifetime of experience interpreting events in Asia', epitomised in the SIS station in Hong Kong.⁵⁸ Furthermore, - and in stark contrast to the Americans - throughout the Second World War, SIS had boasted of 'excellent relations' with the Chinese Communists. Such was the nature of their relations that the wartime Head of Station in Chungking, Colonel Harmon, was close to Chinese Foreign Minister, Zhou En-lai.⁵⁹ Britain's signals intelligence network also owed much to its residual empire, illustrated in GCHQ's station at Little Sai Wan in Hong Kong. This was reflected in the 'clear hierarchy' Britain operated amongst its former territories; whilst Washington might have been the senior partner in its signal alliance, the old Commonwealth often staffed the sites, with Australia being quite prominent in Hong Kong.⁶⁰ The new Commonwealth countries which provided Britain with bases, were also (unknowingly) hosts to GCHQ collection sites.⁶¹ This section examines both the covert and overt intelligence collection Britain undertook from its watchtower.

At the outset of the 1950s, British intelligence in Southeast Asia had been focused on the Malayan Emergency, a long and gruelling conflict that lasted between 1948 and 1960. Thereafter, Britain tried to group the emerging independent states of the region into a Malaysian Federation, which was not successful and which annoyed Indonesia, resulting in a further low-intensity conflict between 1960 and 1965. These two conflicts absorbed a vast proportion of Britain's military resource, at one point a third of the Royal navy were on active service off Indonesia; as result intelligence in Southeast Asia tended to have a military/policing counter-insurgency texture. Intelligence in the

⁵⁸ Aldrich, *The Hidden Hand*, p. 305.

⁵⁹ Ibid, pp. 305-306.

⁶⁰ Desmond Ball, *Signals Intelligence in the Post-Cold War Era: Developments in the Asia-Pacific Region*, (Canberra, 1993); See also R. Hunt et al, *Mandarin Blue: RAF Chinese Linguists -1951 to 1962 – in the Cold War* (Oxford 2008).

⁶¹ Ibid, p. 401. For example, Ceylon, made independent in 1948, allowed Britain to maintain a 'communications relay station' at a base called HMS Anderson, near Colombo.

context of these two related conflicts have been dealt with at length elsewhere and are not subjected to analysis in this thesis.⁶²

Elsewhere in Asia, British intelligence was geared towards collecting information on the Russians, and resources had been heavily allocated this way. However, as the Joint Intelligence Committee was all too aware, this meant that resources and information on Communist China were lacking.⁶³ Although this created greater pressure to gather more information on China, it also generated opportunities for intelligence exchange with the US, due in part to debates on the ground about the degree of risk involved in gathering intelligence by crossing the border into mainland China. This also presented London with an opportunity to recalibrate foreign policy relations with the US; although the two clashed over approaches to China, the UK could still generate some degree of influence over its partner through its contribution to the American intelligence picture on a key adversary.

Overshadowed by Communist violence and political protests that shook the colony in 1967, Britain's ability to gather intelligence on China was placed under considerable strain. Discussions in the Foreign Office as to the British position in Hong Kong, and indeed, possible evacuation plans were revealing of broader imperial decline; a widely-circulated defence review of Hong Kong by the Commonwealth's Defence and Overseas Policy Committee inadvertently acknowledged Britain's withdrawal in other parts of the world in its calculations for Hong Kong. It stated that, 'at a time when we are reducing our other commitments and forces east of Suez' this precluded Britain from making any major reduction to its presence in Hong Kong.⁶⁴ The review underlined Britain's intelligence interest as being 'primarily concerned with China's ability to affect our interests outside the area',

⁶² The academic debates are as labyrinthine as the conflicts: Leon Comber, *Malaya's Secret Police 1945-60: The Role of the Special Branch in the Malayan Emergency*, (Canberra, 2008); Georgina Sinclair, 'The Sharp End of the Intelligence Machine': The Rise of the Malayan Police Special Branch 1948-1955,' *Intelligence and National Security* 26:4 (2011), pp. 460-477; Karl Hack, 'British Intelligence and Counter-Insurgency in the Era of Decolonisation: The Example of Malaya,' *Intelligence and National Security* 14:2 (1999), pp. 124-155; Simon Smith, 'General Templer and Counter-Insurgency in Malaya: Hearts and Minds, Intelligence, and Propaganda', *Intelligence and National Security*, 16:3 (2001), pp. 60-78.

⁶³ Chi-Kwan Mark, *Hong Kong and the Cold War: Anglo-American Relations, 1949-1957*, (Oxford, 2004), p. 180.

⁶⁴ TNA, FCO 21/199, Commonwealth Office, 'Defence and Overseas Policy (Official) Committee Defence Review Working Party: Hong Kong: Long Term Study', 18th August 1967.

pointing to regional trade and investment as key concerns, as well as Britain's commitments to maintain regional peace through SEATO, and its obligation to Commonwealth countries.⁶⁵ Yet, in addition to political and military reasons, intelligence was cited as a principal reason for maintaining a presence in the colony. Although most of Britain's intelligence on China was derived from overt sources, London conceded that 'even these are heavily restricted and frequently less available than in other Communist countries'. Thus, London depended 'for a great deal of the most vital kinds' of intelligence collected by clandestine means, stating that, 'should we be denied the facilities presently available to use in Hong Kong it would be impossible to replace them'.⁶⁶

Since the 1950s, Britain had therefore sought greater military and political intelligence on the Maoist regime in China. From its diplomatic, consular, and military stations in Beijing, Mukden, Shanghai, and Canton, the SIS and Foreign Office were able to gather intelligence on China, albeit restricted by operating in a security state.⁶⁷ Both British SIS and MI5 maintained 'sizeable' stations in Hong Kong in particular.⁶⁸ Working along British military intelligence officers, under the cover of 'political advisors', these officers harvested a range of overt intelligence gained from Chinese publications, human intelligence from interrogations, and political intelligence through their access to the diplomatic community in Hong Kong. However, to some extent, they were inferior to members of the Hong Kong Police Special Branch, who enjoyed an extensive presence across the colony, and ran their own undercover operations. Cooperation between the security services and Special Branch was regular, aided by the existence of Local Intelligence Committees (LICs).⁶⁹ Additionally, the SIS station in Hong Kong worked closely with the military, being positioned within an Army base in the colony.⁷⁰

The SIS station in Hong Kong in the late 1960s was headed by John Colvin, and later, Brian Stewart - both SIS officers who were also stationed in Hanoi at the peak of the American bombing

⁶⁵ Ibid.

⁶⁶ Ibid.

⁶⁷ Aldrich, *The Hidden Hand* p. 3.

⁶⁸ Ibid.

⁶⁹ Georgina Sinclair, *At the End of the Line: Colonial Policing and the Imperial Endgame 1945-1980*: (Manchester, 2006), p.198.

⁷⁰ Private information.

campaign over North Vietnam. Both worked closely with Murray Macle hose, the most senior diplomat in Hong Kong (and former wartime SIS officer), and the Director of the Hong Kong Police Special Branch to gather intelligence on China. Often travelling around the region to other stations in locations such as Singapore and Beijing, they also sought to set up or strengthen intelligence liaison with other intelligence agencies.⁷¹ As the defence review noted, SIS was also able to use its Hong Kong base for mounting covert operations against China. The document noted that SIS ‘already provide valuable coverage of Chinese foreign trade, currency dealings, gold, and foreign exchange holdings’, also having been able to mount marine operations against Chinese naval targets and ports.⁷²

It is worth noting that China’s own intelligence activities in Hong Kong provided valuable opportunities for SIS. Correspondence to the Foreign Office over one of Britain’s covert channels to China – used primarily for negotiating the release of British journalist Anthony Grey, taken captive in Hong Kong – revealed that ‘just as the West had China Watchers in Hong Kong, so China had Southeast Asia Watchers and Western World Watchers in Hong Kong’. Although it stated that for China, ‘of greatest importance’ was the fact that Hong Kong enabled its agents to ‘easily and readily obtain foreign exchange in or through Hong Kong’,⁷³ without which it would have been difficult to obtain funds for its intelligence agents overseas, this presented SIS with another means for intelligence exploitation. As London observed, Chinese use of Hong Kong as a centre for both intelligence and subversive operations ‘has enabled MI6 to penetrate certain of these operations’ particularly concerning subversion into Thailand, which provided intelligence on Chinese ‘operational methods, personnel, and intentions’.⁷⁴

The SIS station spearheaded human intelligence gathering in Hong Kong, through a combination of covert and overt means. Having previously mentioned the advantageous nature of British trade in Hong Kong, SIS exploited this relationship, working closely with prominent banks and trading companies in Hong Kong, as well as the Chinese mainland. However, this came with

⁷¹ Brian Stewart, in discussion with the author, November 2014.

⁷² TNA, FCO 21/199, Commonwealth Office, ‘Defence and Oversea Policy (Official) Committee Defence Review Working Party: Hong Kong: Long Term Study’, 18th August 1967.

⁷³ TNA, FCO 21/490, Cater (HK) to Murray (London), 20th June 1969.

⁷⁴ TNA, FCO 21/199, Commonwealth Office, ‘Defence and Oversea Policy (Official) Committee Defence Review Working Party: Hong Kong: Long Term Study’, 18th August 1967.

some strings attached; the practice resulted in the companies being on the circulation list for the finished intelligence product.⁷⁵ In terms of more clandestine methods, however, SIS sought to exploit a key advantage it had discovered with regard to travellers passing through China - their movement. An idea attributed to Colvin, by cultivating networks of human agents on Chinese railway routes, SIS was able to garner intelligence from areas of China that were either too remote, or inaccessible to SIS officers due to the political and physical risks involved. In addition to general political observations, these agents were able to report on information of a military nature, such as intelligence on military movements.⁷⁶ Additionally, the SIS officers received technical training in photography, meaning that they - or their agents - were able to obtain the occasional photograph of scientific and atomic development plants deep inside China.⁷⁷

Crucially, Hong Kong's HUMINT value also came from intelligence derived through the interviewing of defectors and travellers from mainland China. Numerous scholars have pointed to Hong Kong's centrality as a location for gathering human intelligence on China owing to the steady flow of refugees from mainland China.⁷⁸ There is mild dispute as to whether the British or the Americans held the advantage when it came to processing refugees and thus extracting information. Lombardo claims that the British 'frequently allowed US officials to interview refugees fleeing China', which, in addition to sources cultivated by the CIA, essentially enabled the US Consulate-General to act as a 'processing plant' for intelligence in Hong Kong.⁷⁹ This is in contrast to Chi-Kwan, who states that the Hong Kong Special Branch and British SIS interrogated the majority of Chinese refugees, underlining that 'unless by special arrangement with the British, the American Consulate was not allowed to interrogate Chinese nationals on a large scale; its proposals for a joint interrogation team were consistently rejected'. Chi-Kwan also emphasises that the only interrogated individuals permitted for the US were 'walk-ins', or Westerners allowed to leave the mainland, which

⁷⁵ Private information.

⁷⁶ Stewart, in discussion with the author, November 2014.

⁷⁷ Ibid.

⁷⁸ See Lombardo, 'The American Consulate in Hong Kong, 1949-64', p.64; Chi-Kwan, 'American 'China Hands' in the 1950s', pp. 174-175.

⁷⁹ Lombardo, 'The American Consulate in Hong Kong, 1949-64', p. 66.

included missionaries, travellers, and journalists.⁸⁰ Although mention is made of the CIA branch in Hong Kong being involved in interrogating refugees, he underlines that ‘direct evidence of this is scarce’.⁸¹

Drawing upon their diplomatic cover under the auspices of the Foreign Office, the SIS officers were also able to extract political intelligence from the diplomatic community in Hong Kong. This was with particular focus on the Russians, and the broader Sino-Soviet rivalry. In comments to a Joint Intelligence Committee (JIC) report at the height of the Cultural Revolution, the Foreign Office noted that although official contact with the Soviets in Beijing was often ‘desultory and unproductive’, unofficial contacts with them at diplomatic receptions proved ‘extremely useful’ to them.⁸² For example, the intelligence officers would often exchange with the Eastern Europeans information on Chinese internal affairs, derived from post-reading. Moreover, through these exchanges, the British gained access to ‘the most interesting sections of the Chinese provincial press’, to which the Eastern Europeans still had access, with Western countries having been denied such publications several years before.⁸³

The Foreign Office found this to be especially useful with regard to the Soviets, because the Eastern Europeans operated a ‘pooling system of information’, from which the Russians could quite freely draw, asserting that the British ‘obtained very much the best of the bargain in these exchanges’. Nonetheless, formal exchanges still had their merits. Taking place primarily with Czech, Polish, and Bulgarian officials, and it was assumed that these exchanges were conducted ‘at the very least with Soviet acquiescence’, and under tight Soviet direction. Furthermore, the Foreign Office also noted that contact with the Mongolians was advantageous, because they were able to essentially exploit their ethnicity to ‘travel around Beijing much more unobtrusively’ than Westerners or the Eastern Europeans. The utility of such political intelligence was clear in the Foreign Office’s eyes, which

⁸⁰ Chi-kwan, ‘American ‘China Hands’ in the 1950s, p. 175.

⁸¹ Ibid.

⁸² TNA, CAB 190/9, FCO comments on report, 30th November 1970 (Attached paper to Joint Intelligence Committee, ‘Working Party on Soviet Interest in Intelligence on China’, SIS Draft Paper, 24th November 1970).

⁸³ Ibid.

steadfastly wrote that it was ‘hardly necessary to underline how useful these exchanges are, especially in the context of JIC’.⁸⁴

Running parallel to SIS efforts to gather a range of intelligence was British signals intelligence, through the GCHQ station at Little Sai Wan. The Commonwealth Defence Review affirmed that Hong Kong’s value for intelligence procurement ‘lies primarily in the cover it provides for SIGINT operations’. GCHQ’s ‘largest overseas station’ was situated in Hong Kong, and ‘responsible for the main UK contribution to SIGINT coverage of Chinese communications’.⁸⁵ As confirmed through official documents, this was both collected and shared by and with their American counterparts, the National Security Agency, and their Australian counterparts, the Defence Signals Bureau.⁸⁶ Based at an RAF station, the alliance went under the cover name of the Combined Signals Organisation for the Services (CSOS).⁸⁷ Certainly, according to defence officials, the post was stressed to be the ‘main source of British intelligence on China’, alongside signals intelligence facilities at Tai Mo Shan, were regarded as ‘of great important to the United Kingdom and United States intelligence on China’.⁸⁹

British signals intelligence from its ‘watchtower’ largely concerned China’s nuclear weapon development, or military and nuclear-related matters. Indeed, as the review confirmed, SIGINT was the main source Britain’s information on the Chinese Armed Forces in mainland China, and on the Chinese military presence in North Vietnam.⁹⁰ Furthermore, it also ‘provide valuable information on the Chinese missile and nuclear testing programme, on Chinese defence-related industries, and scientific and technical progress’, as well as some material on economic and political activity,

⁸⁴ Ibid.

⁸⁵ Commonwealth Office, ‘Defence and Oversea Policy (Official) Committee Defence Review Working Party: Hong Kong: Long Term Study’, 18th August 1967.

⁸⁶ Desmond Ball, ‘Over and Out: Signals Intelligence (Sigint) in Hong Kong, *Intelligence and National Security*, 11:3 (1996), pp. 474-479.

⁸⁷ TNA, FCO 21/200, (Unknown) to Greenhill (London), ‘Contingency Planning: Hong Kong’, December 1967. Discussions between Berger, US Deputy Assistant Secretary for Far Eastern Affairs, and Booker, Under Secretary in the Australian Department of External Affairs, confirmed the presence of Australian personnel in Hong Kong, engaged in signals intelligence activity there, as well as ‘a few American liaison officers...and British personnel’.

⁸⁸ See also, Easter, ‘GCHQ and British External Policy in the 1960s’, pp. 683-684.

⁸⁹ Ibid. p. 684.

⁹⁰ TNA, FCO 21/200, (Unknown) to Greenhill (London), ‘Contingency Planning: Hong Kong’, December 1967.

including international trade and finance.⁹¹ Although GCHQ did not break much high-grade Chinese traffic, it still intercepted intelligence that detailed China's moves towards developing and testing a nuclear weapon in the early 1960s.⁹² Requiring a significant technical and industrial effort in its move towards acquiring a nuclear weapon, this process was captured through overhead flights that were able to record imagery, alongside relatively low-level signal intercepts. Archie Potts, the UK's Deputy Director of Atomic Energy Intelligence noted that for about five years they had been aware of an important secret programme controlled by a 'special ministry' in China. In fact, as signs of the weapons programme underway, plant construction had begun in 1958, involving efforts to produce uranium ore, and publicly, the Chinese had become silent in their complaints about other superpower nations possessing nuclear weapons. This prefaced China's first nuclear test in 1964.⁹³ Lower-grade intercepts also gave the British some idea of Chinese military support to the North Vietnamese army throughout the 1960s.

However, British sigint was limited in the extent that it was able to provide real-time intelligence on China. Chinese communications security practices were so stringent and well-observed that they frustrated the efforts of both the British and Americans in intercepting high-level traffic, meaning that imagery intelligence from U2 missions, and satellite reconnaissance was a more immediate source of intelligence upon China.⁹⁴ Moreover, the British station at Little Sai Wan suffered from significant internal security deficiencies. Not only were large numbers of highly classified documents stolen with relative frequency by Chinese staff, but the station 'was evidently seriously penetrated by Chinese intelligence', demonstrated through the arrest of a Chinese linguist in 1961, reported to have sent daily reports into China for two years.⁹⁵⁹⁶ In this way, it is important to

⁹¹ Ibid.

⁹² Ball, 'Over and Out', p. 482.

⁹³ TNA, FO 371/149546, Potts (DD/AEI) minutes, 'Chinese Interest in Nuclear Weapons' 15 and 17 June 1960.

⁹⁴ Aid and Richelson, 'US Intelligence and China', p. 2.

⁹⁵ Ball, 'Over and Out: Signals Intelligence in Hong Kong', pp. 481-482.

⁹⁶ See also Easter, 'GCHQ and British External Policy in the 1960s', p. 688 for further detail on the security breaches the agency ached uring this period, including a Chinese Communist spy ring, which included a translator working at Little Sai Wan.

underline that, despite British sigint efforts, much of the picture of China during the Cultural Revolution came from British commercial telegrams through the Foreign Office.⁹⁷

In addition to SIS and GCHQ, other sources continued to provide valuable intelligence from Hong Kong. Importantly, a key agency in Hong Kong was the Special Branch. Responsible for a range of reports and publications, including interrogation reports of refugees from the Chinese mainland, these provided 'valuable information mainly about conditions in provinces in South and Central China'.⁹⁸ The Defence Review also pointed to 'a major radar installation' location in Hong Kong, that was 'of unique value' in providing intelligence on air movements.⁹⁹ Additionally, archival documents suggest that the British MoD's main intelligence-gathering outfit in Hong Kong - JSIS - was the organisation concerned 'largely with the interrogation of refugees from the mainland'.¹⁰⁰ Whilst the answer is still unclear as to who lead interrogations and processing of the refugee sources, what remains is that interrogation reports were exchanged between the Americans and British. According to one interrogation officer, there was a 'good working arrangement with the Brits'.¹⁰¹

As previously mentioned, the majority of intelligence gathered in Hong Kong was overt. Furthermore, much of the covert material had overlaps with overt intelligence gathered from a range of public sources in Hong Kong. A considerable amount of the overt material found its way into memoranda published by the Research Department of the Foreign Office. Crammed full of detail, these memoranda were usually based on hundreds of overt intelligence reports (between one and four hundred) that comprised of information gained from travellers, as well as extensive interviews with emigrants (many single overt intelligence reports dealt with over fifty emigrants).¹⁰² For example, typical sources would include farmers, reports from hospitals and clinics, students, and individuals

⁹⁷ Aid and Richelson, 'US Intelligence and China', pp. 8-9.

⁹⁸ Commonwealth Office, 'Defence and Oversea Policy (Official) Committee Defence Review Working Party: Hong Kong: Long Term Study', 18th August 1967.

⁹⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰⁰ TNA, FCO 21/494, Wilson (London) to Mills (London), 9th September 1969.

¹⁰¹ Chi-kwan, 'American 'China Hands' in the 1950s, p. 175.

¹⁰² TNA, FCO 51/6, Research Department Memorandum, 'Conditions in China: Overt Intelligence Reports Dealing with the Period January to April, 1967', Summary No. 17, February 1968.

who operated on the black market.¹⁰³ This was aided by ‘Operation Debenture’, which Britain launched in 1954, designed to stimulate more defectors from China to Hong Kong. A covert radio project that constituted one of the first UK operations for penetrating mainland China, the operation sought to establish an undercover broadcasting station that through increasing the desire for contact between the West and Chinese middle classes, could also increase defections across the border in Hong Kong. Emphasis was very much upon the ‘intelligence’ angle of the operation, as SIS human agent coverage of China had been patchier in the 1950s. Although originally intended to be located in Hong Kong itself, the black station was eventually established in Singapore, hidden at a British military base.¹⁰⁴

Intended for specialist audiences such as the Foreign Office’s Sinologists, these reports were often left unedited for their recipients, for fear of prejudicing the interrogation process through which the intelligence was obtained.¹⁰⁵ At the height of the Cultural Revolution’s violent phase in 1967 and 1968, the overt intelligence reports yielded information of political and military value. Saturated with details of clashes between different Red Guard factions, interventions by the Chinese People’s Liberation Army (PLA), and violent incidents whereby Red Guard officers killed civilians, such details illuminated the military aspects of China’s unsteady and rapid political change. The reports also occasionally yielded information of a military intelligence nature. For example, a Research Department memorandum from May to August 1967, which was based on 284 overt intelligence reports, made mention of a Peking Radio Components Research Centre. Situated just outside Beijing, this centre for applied technology research produced high-frequency transistors, power valves, and high-speed switches, for which almost the total output was deemed to be ‘for military use’.¹⁰⁶ Furthermore, observations on rations, wages, the black market, medicine, militia recruitment, education, and radio broadcasts lent a broader context to the social impact and reach of the Cultural

¹⁰³ TNA, FCO 51/6, FED (London) to China and Korea Research Department (London), comments, Research Department Memorandum, ‘Conditions in China: Overt Intelligence Reports Dealing with the Period January to April, 1967’, Summary No. 17, February 1968.

¹⁰⁴ Aldrich, *GCHQ*, pp. 151-155.

¹⁰⁵ TNA, FCO 51/6, Research Department Memorandum, ‘Conditions in China: Overt Intelligence Reports Dealing with the Period September to December, 1966’, Summary No. 16, 3rd October 1967.

¹⁰⁶ Ibid, Research Department Memorandum, ‘Conditions in China: Overt Intelligence Reports Dealing with the Period May to August, 1967’, Summary No. 18, 23rd May 1968.

Revolution.¹⁰⁷ Moreover, the reports' distribution list was revealing of the intelligence's utility in contextualising events in China; British recipients included the Cabinet Office, the Ministry of Defence (MoD), Security Service, GCHQ, and JSIS Hong Kong, whilst American counterparts included the CIA, United States Information Service (USIA), and the United States Bureau of Intelligence and Research (INR).¹⁰⁸

When combined with another core component of the intelligence machinery in Hong Kong - Local Intelligence Committees (LICs) - the British were able to piece together a detailed picture of political events in China. With a particular focus on information of a military nature, monthly external intelligence reports detailed violent clashes between pro and anti-Maoist groups, local propaganda, communications and transport, unit movements and strength of the ACCA Army, and refugee movements. Extra attention was paid to the PLA, whose involvement as a mediating force between the central and provincial party machinery made it an important intelligence target.¹⁰⁹¹¹⁰ Such information had its use in defence intelligence circles in particular. The British Defence Intelligence Service (DIS), for example, in discussion of the 'new and more dangerous situation' emerging in China during the Cultural Revolution, affirmed that its focus lay 'not on the day-to-day events in Hong Kong', but in trying to deduce the attitude of the Beijing Government, through understanding local dynamics.¹¹¹

These reports also captured local political dynamics at play in Hong Kong. Through their coverage of local protests, the flurry of communist delegation and trade union activity, local labour movements, and border area activity,¹¹² the LICs produced weekly assessment to the JIC that enabled the British to understand the parameters of the Cultural Revolution in terms of its physical reach or

¹⁰⁷ Ibid, Research Department Memorandum, 'Conditions in China: Overt Intelligence Reports Dealing with the Period September to December 1967', Summary No. 19, 23rd July 1968.

¹⁰⁸ Ibid, Far Eastern Department (London) to China and Korea Research Department (London), comments, Research Department Memorandum, 'Conditions in China: Overt Intelligence Reports Dealing with the Period January to April, 1967', Summary No. 17, February 1968.

¹⁰⁹ TNA, FCO 40/101, Governor (Hong Kong) to Secretary of State (London), 24th November 1967, 'LIC Monthly External Intelligence Report, July 1967'.

¹¹⁰ TNA, CAB 191/17, LIC (HK) Assessment of the External Threat to HK, 23rd August 1967.

¹¹¹ TNA, DEFE 4/219, MoD (London), Chiefs of Staff Committee, Minutes, 11th July 1967 (55th Meeting/67).

¹¹² TNA, 40/101, Trench (LIC, Hong Kong) to JIC (London), Tel no. 674, 27th May 1968.

limits, its violent impact through casualties, and ultimately, its sustainability in terms of political momentum.¹¹³ For example, one report based on information obtained from travellers noted the manner in which fighting between rival factions had earned them the ‘enmity of the local people’, thus shedding light upon local political tensions.¹¹⁴

The intelligence provided by the LICs was particularly valuable across 1967 and 1968, as a bombing campaign in Hong Kong by the Chinese Communists reached its peak. Detailing to London a wide range of details on the bomb campaign, the LIC drew upon reports compiled by the district police and military, which was in turn collected by the colony police and military forces, who produced their own weekly report.¹¹⁵ The LIC was therefore to report to London information on targets (security forces, public utilities, and government installations), but also determined that the ‘haphazard nature’ of bomb placements away from strategic targets, as well as the use of hoax bombs, indicated that aim of the campaign was not so much to cause damage, but rather to ‘frighten the population generally and sap their will to resist’, thus undermining the Hong Kong Government in the process. Other intelligence included finer detail on bomb manufacture, recruits, materials, design sophistication, etc.¹¹⁶

Such intelligence was not without its constraints, however. In the case of the LIC monthly or weekly assessments of Hong Kong during the bombing campaign, there were clear reliability issues with the raw intelligence gathered. As previously mentioned, using reports compiled by district police and military, one LIC noted that a ‘considerable amount’ of information received by the police on bomb factories and workers was anonymous. Moreover, this raised issues of vagueness, inaccuracy, and in some cases, it was noted that the information provided was ‘clearly malicious’, pointing to issues of distortion.¹¹⁷ DIS also experienced similar issues in their interrogations of refugees and

¹¹³ Ibid, Governor (Hong Kong) to Secretary of State (London), 24th November 1967, ‘LIC Monthly External Intelligence Report, July 1967’.

¹¹⁴ Ibid, Governor (Hong Kong) to Secretary of State (London), 24th November 1967, ‘LIC Monthly External Intelligence Report, July 1967’.

¹¹⁵ TNA, CAB 191/17, LIC (HK), ‘The Communist Bomb Campaign to 25th September 1967’, 20th October 1967, J.139/3.

¹¹⁶ Ibid, LIC (HK), ‘The Communist Bomb Campaign to 25th September 1967’, 20th October 1967, J.139/3.

¹¹⁷ Ibid, LIC (HK), ‘The Communist Bomb Campaign to 25th September 1967’, 20th October 1967, J.139/3.

defectors. One particular instance of an illegal immigrant who had served in the Chinese Communist Army (CCA) typified the flaws in raw intelligence that JSIS extracted from such sources. Codenamed 'Grand Arkle', although it was believed that the source would produce 'some invaluable information, some of it being very controversial', JSIS acknowledged key source limitations too, including their limited knowledge ranked as only a private soldier, their submission to poor political indoctrination, and their service during the turmoil of the Cultural Revolution, which would have heavily shaped the soldier's understanding of the CCA.¹¹⁸

Additionally, in the case of the overt intelligence that made its way into the Foreign Office Research Memoranda, the intelligence was often outdated, to some extent. Acknowledging that the reports were subject to a time lag, an official in the China and Korea Research Department conceded that, since the memoranda covered a four-monthly period, 'in order to have a substantial amount of material available for the production of a summary of conditions in a given period', they had to wait 'for at least a month beyond the period' in question to receive the reports. This had an analytical purpose, however; without waiting for this duration, the conditions described in the reports would be based on too few accounts.¹¹⁹ Thus, although the time lag allowed for a greater degree of reliability, it paradoxically prevented use of up-to-date intelligence for the British.

The Regional Information Office (RIO) in Hong Kong was also another component of SIS's structure in the colony. Located in Ridley House, RIO was housed as an analytical department of the Foreign Office, but essentially a sub-section of the British SIS in Hong Kong. Maintaining contact with SIS, RIO took on a variety of roles pertaining to monitoring, accessing, and producing Chinese publications, both official and unofficial. One of RIO's key roles was to monitor the supply and circulation of official and black market newspapers and periodicals from China, though efforts in this regard were often 'unavailing' due to strict security restrictions in China, which made it risky to smuggle publications across its border. It also monitored broadcasting operations, as well as general

¹¹⁸ TNA, FCO 21/481, David (Hong Kong) to Thorne (London), 12th June 1969.

¹¹⁹ TNA, FCO 51/6, FED (London) to China and Korea Research Department (London), comments, Research Department Memorandum, 'Conditions in China: Overt Intelligence Reports Dealing with the Period January to April, 1967', Summary No. 17, February 1968.

publications output from other governmental departments, China specialists, and foreign correspondents.¹²⁰

The BBC World Monitoring Service was an important component part of the overt collection effort. A dedicated team listened in to the output from twelve radio stations across Southern and Western China. Under a long-standing agreement with the CIA's equivalent organisation the Americans covered Chinese broadcasts from Northern and Eastern China from their own station in Okinawa. This division of labour had much to do with the technical issues of reception at Hong Kong and Okinawa.¹²¹ The BBC Monitoring Service was a fascinating example of overt/covert collection. Its product was freely available to journalist and academics and was in no sense secret. Yet it was at the same time funded from the British intelligence budget and some of its collection sites were disguised.¹²²

The RIO was at the centre of information exchange over China, receiving information sources from the BBC monitoring office, correspondence from the British Mission in Beijing, Foreign Office material, and Hong Kong Police Special Branch reports on the results of interrogations of Chinese refugees.¹²³ In the case of the British Mission in Beijing, it received publications that SIS officers there collected and forwarded to Hong Kong, arranging for their distribution and usage elsewhere. Additionally, it also made purchases for other offices, and bought Chinese and Communist publications from left-wing bookshops in Hong Kong.¹²⁴ Significantly, RIO also produced its own information output. Amongst duplications, the China Series, and its Radio Report, was the *China News Summary*, a weekly bulletin that was distributed to all Hong Kong newspapers, foreign

¹²⁰ TNA, FO 1110/1966, Regional Information Office (Hong Kong), Quarterly Report, January-March 1965.

¹²¹ Intriguingly, the KGB had a comprehensive overview of British Intelligence in Hong Kong, see e Christopher M. Andrew, Oleg Gordievsky, *More 'instructions from the Centre': Top Secret Files on KGB Global Espionage* (London, 1999), pp. 68-9.

¹²² Laura M. Calkins, 'Patrolling the Ether: US-UK Open Source Intelligence Cooperation and the BBC's Emergence as an Intelligence Agency, 1939-1948', *Intelligence and National Security*, 26:1 (2011), pp.1-22; Kalev Leetaru, 'The Scope of FBIS and BBC Open Source Media Coverage, 1979-2008,' *Studies in Intelligence* 54:1 (2010), pp. 51-71; Michael Goodman, 'British Intelligence and the British Broadcasting Corporation: A Snapshot of a Happy Marriage,' *Spinning Intelligence, Why Intelligence Needs the Media, Why the Media Needs Intelligence* (London 2009), pp. 117-32.

¹²³ Christopher M. Andrew and Oleg Gordievsky, *Instructions from the Centre: Top Secret Files on KGB Foreign Operations, 1975-1985*, (London, 1991), p. 75.

¹²⁴ Ibid.

Consulates-General, journalists, and academics.¹²⁵ Observing that its office was ‘frequently resorted to’ by foreign correspondents in Hong Kong for special briefings, the RIO’s information output often ended up in British and American newspapers and magazines, making it a real locus of information exchange in Hong Kong.¹²⁶ This was underlined in the fact that amongst its total recipients were fifteen American agencies, illustrating its prowess as an information hub on China.¹²⁷

Sino-Soviet Tensions and Espionage

Framing the British approach to intelligence collection in Asia was the broader Sino-Soviet rivalry that engulfed most of East and Southeast Asia during the Cold War. Evident through discussion in JIC reports from the late 1960s, this impacted British intelligence requirements significantly, particularly as nuclear weapon development - or rather, competition - underlay tensions between the two powers. It raised questions for discussion at two key levels; firstly, at a macro level, it required JIC to produce assessments on how the broader diplomatic and strategic balance in Asia would be affected by the Sino-Soviet dispute. In addition to Soviet anxieties over China and vice-versa, doctrinal differences, broader alliances with Western nations, differences over Vietnam, and differing tactics in the Third World, were all areas that JIC sought to produce assessments on, especially in terms of what this meant for the West, in terms of splintering the broader Communist movement in the region.¹²⁸

There was a distinct nuclear dimension to these intelligence requirements too; not only was the Chinese nuclear deterrent capability a real issue, but the practicalities of a Sino-Soviet nuclear confrontation were also on the JIC’s agenda, both in terms of pre-emptive strikes by the Russians, and the involvement of third parties.¹²⁹ This was particularly following efforts by British agents in the 1950s to gain intelligence on various nuclear-related plants at Lanchow and Pao Tou in north-central

¹²⁵ TNA, FO 1110/1966, Regional Information Office (Hong Kong), Quarterly Report, January-March 1965; Andrews and Gordievsky, *Instructions from the Centre*, p. 75.

¹²⁶ TNA, FO 1110/1966, Regional Information Office (Hong Kong), Quarterly Report, January-March 1965.

¹²⁷ Ibid.

¹²⁸ TNA, CAB 163/141, Draft Planning Paper, ‘Sino-Soviet Dispute’, JIC, 24th October 1969.

¹²⁹ Ibid, Cradock (Planning Staff, London) to Brimelow (London), ‘American Paper on the Implications for NATO of the Sino-Soviet dispute’, 20th March 1970.

China, which had resulted in little success.¹³⁰ Resultantly, intelligence on nuclear development turned out to be a key aspect of British-American intelligence on China. CIA briefings for Commonwealth Liaison Officers often sought to discuss weaponry as it pertained to the Sino-Soviet dispute, such as weapon development, tactical nuclear weapons as they related to territorial disputes, and even Soviet preventive strikes against Chinese nuclear installations (despite the Foreign Office's belief in Soviet restraint, the Americans 'took even this unlikely possibility quite seriously'),¹³¹ especially towards the late 1960s.

Secondly, at a micro level, this altered on-the-ground requirements for intelligence collection in Hong Kong. In addition to monitoring Soviet and Chinese officials and looking for signs of nuclear military development, China's status as a 'high priority intelligence target of the Soviet Union' meant that the British also took it upon themselves to monitor Soviet approaches to Chinese contacts in Hong Kong. For these purposes, the JIC established a Working Party on Soviet Approaches for Intelligence on China, that discussed areas including Soviet approaches to various officials, definitional issues of 'approaches' versus 'intelligence' in Chinese eyes, and also Soviet difficulties in penetrating Hong Kong, relating the latter 'not only to xenophobia, but also to the efficiency of the Chinese security service and the restrictive social structure'.¹³²

The latter was a particular area of concern for the JIC, as Soviet attempts at espionage in the colony steadily grew into the late 1960s. According to a research paper written by SIS in 1970, the first recorded instance of a Russian Intelligence Service (RIS) briefing of a secret agent to obtain intelligence on Communist China occurred in 1964, whilst a defector (albeit one whose reliability was then in dispute) also reported in 1964 that new sections directed against the Chinese had been created in the internal and foreign directorates of the KGB in 1963.¹³³ Importantly, this served as the context

¹³⁰ US Army (Hong Kong) to G2 (Washington), 13 May and 6 June 1952, TS Incoming and Outgoing Cables, RG 319, Box 189, US National Archives; Peer de Silva, *Sub Rosa: the CIA and the Uses of Intelligence*, (New York, 1978), p. 194.

¹³¹ TNA, CAB 163/141, Bolland (Washington) to Thomson (London), 17th September 1969, 'Sino-Soviet Relations'; Bolland (Washington) to Stewart (London), 5th September 1969, 'National Intelligence Estimate on Sino-Soviet Relations'.

¹³² TNA, CAB 190/9, Joint Intelligence Committee, 'Working Party on Soviet Approaches for Intelligence on China', Minutes, 2nd December 1970.

¹³³ Ibid, Attached paper to Joint Intelligence Committee, 'Working Party on Soviet Interest in Intelligence on China', SIS Draft Paper, 24th November 1970. See also FCO 40/72, Elliott (Hong

against which Russian Chairman of the Council of Ministers, Alexei Kosygin, sought to establish Soviet representation in Hong Kong, during a visit to the UK in February 1967. Since his request, SIS recorded twenty-seven recorded instances of ‘unprompted approaches’ by Soviet officials to Western officials, either directly or through an intermediary, seeking intelligence on China, or ‘emphasising Soviet ignorance of developments in that country’, as well as twelve instances of Soviet efforts to obtain intelligence through secret agents. Although Kosygin had provided reassurances to the British that Soviet intelligence efforts would be directed against the Chinese, and not the British, SIS observed a significant increase in Soviet approaches towards officials in 1969, coming on the back of more open approaches towards officials in 1967. Moreover, exchanges with the CIA revealed that by June 1967, the Americans had already received six to eight ‘similar approaches’ (then twice as many made towards the British), usually involving Military Attachés, and members of the RIS.¹³⁴

The British were swift to turn down Kosygin’s request for Soviet representation. Suggesting in its place a ‘regular exchange of information, but not intelligence’, the British offered for this to be formally and centrally coordinated, via either London or Moscow.¹³⁵ Whilst core considerations had included avoiding antagonising relations with China (which was likely to interpret admission of the Russians into Hong Kong as a hostile act), there were also ‘strong technical objections from the intelligence point of view’.¹³⁶ Moreover, officials in the British Embassy in Beijing were particularly averse to a Russian presence in Hong Kong, arguing that, firstly, the British would receive nothing in return, but secondly, that it opened the British up to Russian treachery. Noting that any information passed to the Russians would likely originate from Hong Kong, and given the Russians’ ‘known propensity for creating trouble between Her Majesty’s Government and the Chinese about Hong Kong’, there was every chance that the Russians might arrange for leaks of this material to the Chinese ‘with this end in view’. This was in light of the perception that ‘the Chinese already regard us

Kong) to Carter (London), 26th May 1967 - the Japanese had identified three Russian officials in Hong Kong as intelligence officers, including a member of the GRU.

¹³⁴ Ibid.

¹³⁵ TNA, FCO, 40/72, Hall (London) to Trench (London), 20th April 1967.

¹³⁶ TNA, FCO 40/72, Brown (London), Smith (London), ‘Russian Proposal for an Intelligence Establishment in Hong Kong’, 17th April 1967.

as American spies'.¹³⁷ Indeed, SIS observed that the Russians had surreptitiously established an informal means of representation in Hong Kong in 1969, through two engineers, who supervised the repair of Soviet ships at the Hong Kong and Whampoa Docks, although there were no obvious signs of intelligence activity being conducted by these two individuals.¹³⁸

The episode was a clear illustration of Hong Kong's value outside of mainland China. In its discussion of the Russians' approach, SIS were quick to note the Russians' interest in line with growing borders with China, underlining the political value of having a base in Hong Kong. Moreover, in intelligence terms, it demonstrated Hong Kong's 'obvious attractions as a listening post and operational base' against China. Noting that Chinese xenophobia had 'adversely affected Soviet capability' to run Chinese agents, having a base in Hong Kong would therefore make it easier for the Soviets to conduct 'China-watching' activities, and to gain access to valuable communications intelligence (COMINT) through intelligence exchange with the British, which the Soviets were themselves 'unable to intercept'.¹³⁹

Furthermore, the episode also implied a distinct operational tone to the Russians' request; SIS, noted that having a base in Hong Kong would enable the Russians to operate against Chinese targets in Hong Kong, which would also include American and British China-watchers themselves.¹⁴⁰ This did not go unnoticed by the Foreign Office, which pointed out to JIC its own fruitless attempts to facilitate exchanges with the Russians earlier in 1967 in Beijing. The Foreign Office thus affirmed Russian aspirations to establish a base, 'which they would undoubtedly use extensively for operations against ourselves and the Americans'.¹⁴¹ Having a foothold in Hong Kong therefore improved intelligence and operational capability with regard China, rather than having to 'tap' the product of other established intelligence services already operating there.

¹³⁷ TNA, FCO 21/122, Hopson (Peking) to FCO (London), Tel. no. 493, 17th May 1967.

¹³⁸ TNA, CAB 190/9, Attached paper to Joint Intelligence Committee, 'Working Party on Soviet Interest in Intelligence on China', SIS Draft, 24th November 1970.

¹³⁹ Ibid.

¹⁴⁰ Ibid.

¹⁴¹ TNA, CAB 190/9, Eastern European and Soviet Department (London), comments, Attached paper to Joint Intelligence Committee, 'Working Party on Soviet Interest in Intelligence on China', SIS Draft Paper, 24th November 1970.

The Special Intelligence Relationship in Hong Kong

Despite the earlier tensions displayed between the British and the Americans in the 1950s, Hong Kong still demonstrated a high degree of intelligence cooperation between the two allies. Moreover, it revealed the centrality of British intelligence to the American intelligence community, which, although it possessed a vast Consulate-General in Hong Kong, lacked a direct window into Beijing. This is underlined by Lombardo, who in drawing upon the words of Whiting in 1965, highlighted the significance of the Consulate-General when he stated that, ‘for all intents and purposes’, the American Consulate-General in Hong Kong was effectively the US’s ‘Peking Embassy’.¹⁴²

Britain’s ability to make a contribution to American intelligence was particularly strong in the area of non-Soviet targets, as previously discussed.¹⁴³ As Aldrich notes, because of America’s long-term commitment to confrontation with Communist China over Korea, Taiwan, and later, Vietnam, British territories in Asia therefore proved ‘invaluable’, particularly in light of the US’s total absence in Beijing.¹⁴⁴ In fact, the degree of American appreciation for the British intelligence became clear to Foreign Office officials at a time when the British Embassy’s very existence was under threat. In a review as to the benefits – and risks – of maintaining the Hong Kong post, the Commonwealth Office underlined its importance to the Americans as a vital factor in the embassy’s continued operation, acknowledging that ‘the Americans who have a considerable intelligence staff in Hong Kong working on China, attach great importance to the British effort’, particularly concerning covert collection facilities.¹⁴⁵

Although the value of Britain’s output from Hong Kong was clear to the Americans, there were broader concerns that factored in. Such was the American appetite for the material, that the loss of Hong Kong would have been considered not only a pitfall for the American defence and intelligence community on China, but also a ‘setback for the efforts of the West’ to gain intelligence

¹⁴² Lombardo, ‘The American Consulate in Hong Kong, 1949-64’, p. 77.

¹⁴³ Aldrich, *The Hidden Hand*, p. 347.

¹⁴⁴ Richard J. Aldrich, ‘British Intelligence and the Anglo-American ‘Special Relationship’ during the Cold War’, *Review of International Studies*, 24:3 (1998), p. 347.

¹⁴⁵ TNA, FCO 21/199, Commonwealth Office, ‘Defence and Oversea Policy (Official) Committee Defence Review Working Party: Hong Kong: Long Term Study’, 18th August 1967.

on China.¹⁴⁶ As the review stated, the information Britain was able to produce on China ‘provides an important element in present arrangements for the exchanges of intelligence worldwide between the Americans and ourselves’. In particular, Britain’s sigint output from Hong Kong was held up as ‘one of this country’s main contributions to the worldwide exchange of signals intelligence between the UK and the US, an exchange on which the UK is heavily dependent’.¹⁴⁷

As the US deepened its involvement in nearby Vietnam, and sigint requirements geared themselves towards supporting the US campaign there, the US made little progress against Chinese traffic in the 1960s. Echoing the CIA’s failed humint efforts, the US found itself frustrated by such ‘strict and pervasive’ Chinese communications security practices, that these ‘strangled’ US efforts to eavesdrop on China. According to Aid and Richelson, this thwarted the NSA’s efforts to crack ‘virtually all’ high grade Chinese codes and cyphers.¹⁴⁸ Furthermore, illustrative of changing US intelligence requirements, in 1968, just over eight per cent of the National Security Agency’s (NSA) sigint resources were allocated on China, as opposed to fifty per cent for the Soviet Union.¹⁴⁹ British intelligence in Hong Kong therefore had a key role in offsetting this imbalance for their Americans, by relieving the US sigint community of a significant resource burden. Described as being ‘of critical importance’ to the US,¹⁵⁰ discussions with Britain’s intelligence partners were revealing of the utility of intelligence from Little Sai Wan. According to the Director of the Australian Joint Intelligence Organisation in 1974, in Washington it was ‘fully accepted’ that when it came to sigint, the US was ‘willing to rely for its national intelligence purposes on the contribution of its partners under the shared [UKUSA] arrangements’.¹⁵¹

A similar situation prevailed for the Americans concerning human intelligence. This was above all during the Cultural Revolution – a period of rapid, violent change, where the Americans lacked first-hand contact with ordinary Chinese or any sort of observational intelligence from their own people on the ground. American usage of the material was indicative of how British intelligence

¹⁴⁶ Ibid.

¹⁴⁷ Ibid.

¹⁴⁸ Aid and Richelson, ‘US Intelligence and China’, p. 2.

¹⁴⁹ Ibid, pp. 8-9.

¹⁵⁰ Ball, ‘Over and Out: Signals Intelligence in Hong Kong’, p. 493.

¹⁵¹ Ibid.

could make up for the void in American capabilities. This was evident in the fact that as late as 1969, CIA reports on the Chinese secret police were still based primarily on material from interrogations conducted in Hong Kong.¹⁵² Furthermore, CIA reports from Hong Kong continually made their way onto the US President's desk, illustrating their high-level readership. Indeed, this practice went as far back as 1950, in which Hillenkoetter, then Director of the CIA, forwarded informant reports to President Truman.¹⁵³ The significance of information from informants should not be understated either; Edwin Martin, the Consul-General in Hong Kong in the late 1960s recalled the period during the Cultural Revolution as being the most productive, because of the flow of refugees; factional rivalry amongst Red Guards and other communist groups meant that individuals were happy to divulge information believed to expose past crimes of the Party. Martin stated that, 'they published their own little papers, they published documents', illustrating a 'real explosion of information' about what was going on inside China.¹⁵⁴ Thus, nowhere was Hong Kong's value demonstrated that in a 1960 statement by the US National Security Council, affirming the British colony to be 'the most important source of hard economic, political, and military information on Communist China' that the Americans had access to.¹⁵⁵

But the Special Intelligence Relationship in Hong Kong also pointed to a different tension between the British and American intelligence services. Controversially, despite CIA efforts to undermine the Communist regime, British intelligence from Hong Kong was vital to CIA efforts to assess its own destabilising operations. Although the Americans had access to the usual forms of political, economic, and military intelligence through their Consulate-General in Hong Kong, British intelligence also offered them a window into Chinese society, which was inaccessible without a

¹⁵² Joint Intelligence Committee, 'Estimate of Effectiveness of Anti-Communist Guerrillas Operating in China' 12 February 1951, 551, RG 218, US National Archives; CIA Report RSS No.0035/69, 'The Political Security Apparatus', 20 February 1969, Frame 186, Reel IV, *CIA Research on China*, BRO.

¹⁵³ Aldrich, *The Hidden Hand*, p. 308.

¹⁵⁴ Ibid; Lombardo, 'The American Consulate in Hong Kong, 1949-64', p. 51; 51; Ambassador Edwin W. Martin, transcript, 17 March 1988, Foreign Affairs Oral History Project, Library of Congress, Washington, DC.

¹⁵⁵ Lombardo, 'The American Consulate in Hong Kong, 1949-64', p. 71.

human presence in Beijing.¹⁵⁶ This also extended to other parts of China, where the CIA directed much of its efforts to assessing the effect of CIA support for guerrilla activity, particularly in Southeast China, where the target had been to curb Chinese assistance to Ho Chi Minh in Vietnam. Reinforced by information operations involving propaganda leaflets and radio broadcasts, the large numbers of refugees passing through Hong Kong which the British processed, allowed the CIA to measure levels of dissent.¹⁵⁷ Similar efforts were made to assess the effectiveness of the Communist secret police, run by the Ministry of State Security, which often had to counter resistance groups that the CIA supported.¹⁵⁸

Lastly, it is worth noting that Britain recognised itself that support for its ally was a potential area of weakness. In its discussion of the post's future, London conceded that Britain's position in Hong Kong 'makes us vulnerable to pressures' from China, in the sense that the Chinese could leverage this particular dynamic – 'e.g. our support for America' – to influence Britain's policies towards the Special Relationship.¹⁵⁹ Nonetheless, this was a political calculation that had broader, tangible benefits; London received 'much of the product of US intelligence work on China' in return. But, more importantly, at a higher level, for all that Britain was considered the junior partner in the Special Relationship, London noted that it drew 'substantial advantage for our political relations with the United States in return for the facilities we provide'.¹⁶⁰

Conclusion

As a political terrain, Hong Kong epitomised the complexity – and chaos – of the dynamics between Britain, the United States, and China. Nonetheless, the plethora of intelligence organisations operating

¹⁵⁶ Chi-kwan Mark, *Hong Kong and the Cold War: Anglo-American Relations, 1949-1957*, (Oxford, 2004), p.188; William Egan Colby, *Honorable Men: My Life in the CIA*, (New York, 1978), p.103; McGehee, *Deadly Deceits*, pp. 21-2.

¹⁵⁷ Joint Chiefs of Staff, 'Courses of Action Relative to Communist China and Korea - Anti-Communist Chinese', 7 March 1955, 2118/17, RG 218, US National Archives.

¹⁵⁸ Aldrich, *The Hidden Hand*, p. 307.

¹⁵⁹ TNA, FCO 21/199, Commonwealth Office, 'Defence and Oversea Policy (Official) Committee Defence Review Working Party: Hong Kong: Long Term Study', 18th August 1967.

¹⁶⁰ Ibid.

from Britain's colony were but one indication of Hong Kong's utility as a vantage point onto mainland China. Constantly marred by the friction between Chinese Nationalists and Chinese Communists, the intelligence activities of both Britain and the United States were merely but one facet of the broader Special Intelligence Relationship as it pertained to China. If British penetration of some of these Chinese operations pointed to its skill in covert intelligence operations, Hong Kong also demonstrated the depth of overt intelligence collection that Britain was able to provide; this was particularly so in the field of human intelligence derived outside of interrogations, and published material that the British Embassy strove to collect and analyse. Crucially, this demonstrated the notion of intelligence as a 'spectrum' – inclusive of both overt and covert types of intelligence, both of which entered into assessment by Britain's key intelligence customers (primarily, the United States).

Aside from Hong Kong's palpable intelligence function, it was also the prime example of the advantages of Britain's residual empire. As American military involvement in Asia grew, particularly in Vietnam under the Johnson administration, although the American's had their own extensive CIA station guised in their Consulate-General in Hong Kong, their use of British material was evident in their own reporting and intelligence assessments. To a considerable extent, this owed to the 'diplomatic divergence' that created a divide between Britain and America – whilst Britain recognised Communist China, the American refusal to formally acknowledge regime resulted in clear reporting gaps for its intelligence and defence community. Yet, through Britain's long-standing networks, contacts, and former imperial resources, it was able to fill this gap, some of which held 'critical importance' to the Americans, as acknowledged in the US Joint Intelligence Organisation's report of 1974.¹⁶¹

Lastly, whilst Britain's intelligence contribution to the American assessment machine flourished during the 1960s, Britain's technical bases grew less and less immune to technological developments as time passed. Despite Britain's prestige in intelligence terms, as Britain's reliance upon its military footprint decreased in Southeast Asia, American technological advances in the field of signals intelligence grew; the NSA – the American counterpart to GCHQ – eventually overtook

¹⁶¹ Ball, 'Over and Out: Signals Intelligence in Hong Kong', p. 493.

Britain's facilities, epitomised in the fact that Hong Kong, despite operations such as 'Geranium' and 'Kittiwake', was declared to be 'of less importance in the trade-off between allies' into the mid-1970s.¹⁶² Changing political priorities – and certainly political leadership - in Southeast Asia were sealed by the establishment of the US's own sigint station at Khon Kaen in Thailand, indicating a stronger US reliance upon remote operations in line with its own technological advancements.¹⁶³ However, that the British station in Hong Kong was utilised to such an extent by allies until the late 1970s was testament to the utility of British reporting.

¹⁶² Aldrich, *The Hidden Hand*, pp. 483-484.

¹⁶³ Ibid. See also Aldrich, 'British Intelligence and the Anglo-American Special Intelligence Relationship', p. 347.

Beijing: An Embassy in Flames

An Embassy in Flames

The summer of 1967 in Beijing was a vicious, bloody episode in modern Chinese history, to which British diplomatic premises bore witness. Experiencing a period of brutally intense, fast-paced change at the height of Mao's Cultural Revolution, Beijing (then Peking) was a crucible of revolutionary fervour. Although mass political rallies and demonstrations were commonplace, they often descended into violent episodes, the collateral damage of which included political executions, public humiliation, and beatings. In fact, such incidents began to characterise political life in the capital, as unsettling events that were once sporadic became the norm. Hostile demonstrations outside embassies in the diplomatic quarters gathered pace and potency; clashes between workers and students consumed daily life, and in June 1966, an ordinary Chinese person stabbed two foreigners, leading to his public trial before the masses, and subsequent summary execution. These incidents were emblematic of the perforating of China's political and social fabric during the explosive Cultural Revolution. As Percy Cradock, then British Counsellor in Peking stated, what had begun as a 'wave of iconoclasm, turned to extravagant persecution, and finally plain violence'.¹ The diplomatic corps in Beijing were not immune to this, as the British experience that summer came to show.

The staff in the British Embassy was quite small, but contained huge analytical talent. Cradock would soon leave China and spent five years in charge of the Assessments Staff that drafted JIC papers in the Cabinet Office. The First Secretary was Tony Blishen, one of SIS's most talented sinologists. Meanwhile Ray Whitney, a dedicated Cold Warrior would move on to be the last head of the

¹ Percy Cradock, *Experiences of China*, (London, 1994), p. 39.

Information Research Department, before it was closed down by David Owen in 1977. Alongside them were a dedicated team from the Diplomatic Wireless Staff and the Diplomatic and Technical maintenance staff, whose duties include running a 'technical operation' from the embassy which undertook short-range sigint against both Chinese targets and other embassies.

With the exception of a few close allies, Beijing's relations with the international diplomatic community in the capital had slowly been fraying. Whether Communist or non-Communist, violent outbursts came to characterise the experience of numerous embassies and other diplomatic offices. Earlier in 1967, the Mongolian Embassy had been under siege, held by members of the People's Liberation Army (PLA), who had also set fire to the Ambassador's car, in response to the alleged manner in which the Mongolian Ambassador's driver had 'callously treated' a portrait of Chairman Mao. Similarly, both the Indian and Indonesian Embassies in Peking were besieged, the latter having been almost entirely destroyed to the extent that the Indonesians at one point were forced to improvise a makeshift telephone out of the broken telephone, and a 'the remnants of a teapot'.² No-one was safe, and the smallest incident had the potential to attract trouble. In addition to the Russians experiencing an attack on their Consulate, the Kenyan office was 'in trouble' over a traffic incident involving Red Guards, and demonstrations took place against the Ceylonese, for alleged interference with a shipment of Mao badges.³ Along with growing tensions in the Sino-British relationship - particularly over the fraught issue of Hong Kong - London and the Beijing Embassy watched the tide of violence drifting their way, concerned for the vulnerability of the Embassy, as it became clear that 'diplomatic immunity was virtually at an end'.⁴

On 22nd August 1967, it was the turn of the British. Relations between Britain and China had slowly deteriorated over the course of the year, and May saw an acceleration of trouble; a labour dispute in Sanpokong artificial flower factory in Hong Kong had rapidly descended into violent demonstrations across the colony, the ripple effects of which were felt in Beijing. For example, on 15th May 1967, around one million demonstrators marched past the British Office in Peking, whilst a large rally took

² Ibid, pp. 59-60.

³ Ibid, p. 60.

⁴ Ibid.

place at a nearby stadium. This quickly escalated, with the Chinese government deciding to shutter the British Consulate in Shanghai in response to 'intemperate language' used by the Secretary of State, George Brown in a diplomatic meeting. The Consul, Peter Hewitt, had his dignified withdrawal from Shanghai marred by a mob breaking into his residence, who 'frog-marched' him around and destroyed his belongings, only to later be spat upon, struck, and smeared with glue upon leaving the airport.⁵ Broader international events impacted upon the atmosphere within Peking too; accusing Britain of collaborating with America and Israel in the Six Day War, which took place in June 1967, a group of anti-British protestors - which included amongst others, British, African, American, and Arab participants - broke into the British Office, tore down the Union Jack, and smashed a portrait of the Queen.⁶ Such was the state of popular protest against the British, that by the time of the Queen's Birthday Party celebration at the British Office on 9th June, all guests were barred from the event by Red Guard cordons, leaving the British to drink their champagne alone, as their Chinese office staff marched around the garden protesting. Indeed, the sole guest was the Danish Chargé d'Affaires, who had managed to climb over the garden wall into the British compound.⁷

By late August, the mob violence typical of the Peking summer reverberated upon the British embassy again. As tensions flared over Hong Kong, it appeared that the events of June were simply a preview of what was to transpire. On 22nd August 1967, Sir Donald Hopson, the British Chargé, was summoned to the Chinese Foreign Ministry to be told that within forty-eight hours, the British were expected to cancel the ban on three 'patriotic' newspapers in Hong Kong, to free nineteen 'patriotic' journalists held there, and to abrogate pending lawsuits against two Hong Kong newspapers and printing firms. Whilst from the British perspective, total compliance was close to impossible owing to legal processes, it was clear that the British Office could expect 'consequences' of some kind. Indeed, as later exchanges between the Commonwealth Office and the Foreign Office reveals, the ensuing attack on the

⁵ Ibid, pp. 56-57.

⁶ TNA, FCO 21/33, FCO (London), Memo, 'Demonstrations Against Her Majesty's Charge d'Affaires Office and Residence in Peking on 7 June' (no date)

⁷ Cradock, *Experiences of China*, p. 60.

British Embassy in Beijing was acknowledged as ‘the direct result of our failure to comply with a Chinese ultimatum on the treatment of Communist Representatives in Hong Kong’.⁸

These consequences were quick to occur. Later that day, the Chinese staff of the British Office held a meeting on the office’s terrace, to which they asked Hopson to attend. What unfolded next was less so a ‘meeting’, than a manoeuvre designed to draw in other members of the British staff, cutting them off from the building, and leaving them locked outside, in the intense Beijing heat and sunlight. Although the Chinese staff left after several hours, the British staff found the gates of the compound closed; they were effectively under siege in their own quarters, with crowds of demonstrators growing rapidly outside. The main focus was the Office of the British Charge D’affaire, where much of the main embassy business was carried out including cyphers and messaging. Fortunately, the previous day, the British had prepared well for this eventuality, as small-scale demonstrations took place outside the Office. With the shadows of disturbances at the Russian, Indian, and Indonesian Embassies looming over them, they had prepared contingency plans, fitting out riot shutters, stockpiling food, mattresses and other emergency supplies in the Chancery and adjoining Charge’s residence. They had also begun to destroy sensitive documents in advance. Such was the sense of calm preparation that Cradock even managed to fit in an evening swim in the compound!⁹

At 10.20 pm on the evening of 22 August, most of the staff were watching the end of a Peter Sellers film, *The Wrong Arm of the Law*. Given that the embassy was under a vague ultimatum, and given that the Indian and Mongolian embassies had recently been overrun, the attitude of the staff seems to have an almost caricature *sang froid* about it. But with the crowds of demonstrators outside seemingly having reached a zenith, the situation had appeared under control. However, this soon changed; interrupting a game of bridge on the upper floor of the Office, Ambassador Hopson shouted in warning to the rest of his staff, ‘they’re coming!’, as the crowd surged and began to break into the Office. As

⁸ Commonwealth Office (London) to Bolland (London), ‘Cabinet Defence and Oversea Policy (Official) Committee Defence Review Working Party: Hong Kong Contingency Planning: ‘Feasibility Study on Evacuation of HK, Draft reporting of Special Planning Unit’, OPDO (DR)(67) 56, 6th September 1967.

⁹ Cradock, *Experiences of China*, pp. 60-62. For many survivor accounts of the embassy attack, see also: FCO 21/33.

Cradock recalled, 'there was a rushing sound of feet, heavy blows against the door, then flames as cars were set alight'.¹⁰

More by chance than design, a contingency plan Cradock had prepared just days before - somewhat ironically named 'Armageddon' - quickly came into effect: the staff retreated behind various 'defence points' in the British Office, such as the guard's desk or metal grille protecting the 'secure' area of the building. Such was the momentum of the protestors, that 'each line was barely manned before it fell'.¹¹ Eventually making it to the strong room, where all the classified papers were held, the staff remained in the dark for a short period to avoid attracting attention, where they could hear the sound of rushing feet, the noise of breaking glass, heavy blows against the registry door, and even flames as the diplomatic cars were set alight, accompanied by chants of '*Sha! Sha!*' ('kill! kill!'). Exchanging looks, the Chinese speakers amongst the staff knew better than to translate at that moment. At one point, an unidentified liquid began pouring through the wooden riot shutters, until one staff member threw a mattress over the hose supplying it. Some thought it was petrol. Fortunately, it had turned out to be little other than water.

Nonetheless, as the protestors outside set fire to effigies, and eventually the Office building itself, smoke built up inside the strong room, leaving the staff with little option other than to force an exit. With their hands raised in the air, Hopson and Cradock were the first to leave, followed by the rest of the staff, only to be met with 'howls of exultation' from the crowd, and to be set upon with 'everything they had'. Swept away by hostile protestors, the staff were separated from one another, and found themselves 'half by our hair, half-strangled with our ties, kicked, and beaten on the head with bamboo poles'. They were repeatedly forced to bow their heads in submission to Chairman Mao, whilst photographers stood ready to capture images of the staff in this position of humiliation.¹² Eventually being escorted away from the riotous masses by police officers, the British staff were reunited at the diplomatic flats next to their compound. Suffering from bruises, torn clothing, and even concussion - First Secretary Blishen, an SIS officer, had a 'fine black eye', whilst Ambassador Hopson was 'bleeding

¹⁰ Ibid. 'Personal Account for the Burning of the British Office, 22 August'.

¹¹ Ibid, p. 63. TNA, FCO 21/34, Cradock (Peking) to Denson (London), 29th August 1967.

¹² TNA, FCO 21/34, Hopson (Peking) to Brown (London), 'The Burning of the British Office in Peking', 31st August 1967.

copiously' from a head wound. Although the staff has escaped relatively unscathed, the British Residence had been sacked, with all of its contents destroyed, the Office was burnt down, and the official means of transport destroyed, save one bus kept for emergencies.¹³

There was also a somewhat more obscure technical casualty to result from the incident; as the Chinese stormed their way through the registry Office, it transpired that a Rockex cypher machine had been stolen by the Chinese during the attack. Photographs of the Registry after the attack show the distinctive tubular frame of the Rockex machine standing empty. Originating as military technology in Bletchley Park in 1944, before being appropriated for civilian and espionage activity after the Second World War, the Rockex cypher machine used automated one-time pad traffic to send encoded messages. Described as 'super-secret', it also served the purpose of providing extra security for the communications networks of SIS agents around the world, as part of a long-range wireless network to support overseas stations.¹⁴ Co-opting the SIS Section VIII that produced the Rockex machines, the Foreign Office made it the backbone of a new communications system – the Diplomatic Wireless Service, of which the Beijing Embassy had two to four operators, supported by the Diplomatic Technical Maintenance Staff (DTMS). The DWS was technically banned by international diplomatic convention, but nonetheless, took on a second function within Britain's overseas territories – it doubled as a 'secret monitoring service working from within British Embassies and High Commissions', with many DWS operators effectively acting as 'forward collectors' for Britain's Government Communications Headquarters (GCHQ) intelligence service.¹⁵

Fortunately, the Chinese did not get their hands on the crown jewels. They had despatched a dedicated team who 'broke into the cypher machine by breaking through a wall'. However, 'all really sensitive equipment had been removed to the strong room on 21 and 22 August' by the technical operators 'whence it was later recovered and destroyed'. The safes in the strong room remained secure

¹³ Ibid.

¹⁴ Richard J. Aldrich, *GCHQ: The Uncensored Story of Britain's Most Secret Intelligence Agency*, (London, 2010), p. 57.

¹⁵ Ibid, p. 57; p. 192.

and were not penetrated. This was the equipment used for GCHQ's short range interception work. All they lost in this regard were two Astro and CEI receivers 'from the loft'.¹⁶

Nevertheless, the loss of the Rockex cypher machine was highly significant for Britain's communications and operations from Beijing. As a result of what Cradock referred to as 'sins of omission' in a despatch to London not long after the embassy's destruction, he conceded that the decision to 'smash the cypher machines' was taken by Hopson too late into the attack. As smoke filled the registry and the final stages of the attack took place on the secure zone of the Office, for Hopson and Cradock the issue became 'a matter of saving lives' above anything, and thus security the machines fell down the list of priorities. Upon return to the Office, London conjectured that the 'only important piece of classified material missing' was a cypher machine. In 1968, at an inter-departmental meeting of the Cypher Systems Working Group in 1968, most worryingly, this Rockex cypher machine was confirmed as having fallen into the hands of the Communist Chinese.¹⁷

What then is the significance of this tumultuous episode? Numerous historians have drawn upon this case to illustrate the precariousness - and chaos - of Beijing's diplomatic relations during the Cultural Revolution.¹⁸ However, the burning of the British Embassy in Beijing also offers some insight into a core - and often overlooked - component of British diplomatic history: intelligence. The history of British intelligence in China reaches back at least into the late 1800s, where British 'China-watchers' sought to understand Chinese military capabilities as Britain approached the height of its empire.¹⁹ Additionally, substantial literature exists on British intelligence in Asia during the Second World War.²⁰

¹⁶ TNA, FCO 21/34, Cradock to London, 29 August 1967.

¹⁷ TNA, FCO 19/18, Cypher Systems Working Party, Minutes of Third Meeting, 12th June 1968.

¹⁸ For example, see Chi-Kwan Mark, 'Hostage Diplomacy: Britain, China, and the Politics of Negotiation, 1967-1969', *Diplomacy and Statecraft*, 20:3 (2009), pp. 473-493; James Hoare, *Embassies in the East: The Story of the British Embassies in China, Japan, and Korea*, (Richmond, 1999); Ronald C. Keith, *The Diplomacy of Zhou Enlai*, (New York, 1989); Harold C. Hinton, *China's Turbulent Quest: An Analysis of China's Foreign Relations since 1949*, (Bloomington, 1972).

¹⁹ See Eric Setzekorn, 'The First China-Watchers: British Intelligence Officers in China, 1878-1900', *Intelligence and National Security*, 28:2 (2013), pp. 181-201.

²⁰ For example, see, Richard J. Aldrich, Gary D. Rawnsley and Ming-Yeh T. Rawnsley, *The Clandestine Cold War in Asia: Western Intelligence Propaganda, and Special Operations*, (London, 2000); Antony Best, *British Intelligence and the Japanese Challenge in Asia, 1914-1941*, New York, 2002); Richard J. Aldrich, *Imperial Rivalry: British and American Intelligence in Asia, 1942-46*, (Cambridge, 1987); Christopher Baxter, 'A Closed Book? British Intelligence and East Asia, 1945-1950', *Diplomacy and Statecraft*, 22:1 (2011), pp. 4-27; Richard J. Aldrich, 'British Secret

And yet, academic work on Sino-British relations in the 1960s remains noticeably quiet with regard to intelligence.

Moreover, this turbulent period also provides an excellent opportunity to examine the crossover between intelligence and diplomatic activity. This can be seen from three angles: firstly, from 1966 onwards, various Secret Intelligence Service (SIS) officers were stationed at the British Embassy in Peking, and their reporting, as well as those of their Foreign Office colleagues was a key source of both overt and covert intelligence flowing out of Beijing, particularly during such a volatile events of the Cultural Revolution, which caused an upsurge in demands for reporting in the West. Secondly, the British Embassy ransacking was characteristic of what has been referred to as an era of ‘embassy wars’, in which embassies were co-opted into the shadows of the Cold War, and ‘gradually transformed into technical fortresses from which espionage was both launched and repelled’.²¹ Typified by a ‘feverish battle with bugs and telephone taps’, what underlay this violent episode was therefore a distinct undertone of espionage. This was also embodied through fears about the raiding of the embassy’s documents and archives. Thirdly, the episode reflects upon the difficulties of intelligence collection from a diplomacy outpost under severe security restrictions, owed in large part, to the ‘spy phobia’ that pervaded Beijing and hindered the efforts of the British officers to conduct even simple, overt observation.

This carries significance not only in terms of the implications of intelligence’s lingering presence in diplomatic relationships, but also because it bore upon the Anglo-American ‘Special Relationship’ in Asia more broadly. Although the United States had a substantial intelligence presence in Hong Kong through the US Consulate-General (as previously explored), it lacked its own presence in Beijing at a time when local knowledge was key to understanding the rapid fluctuations in Chinese leadership, which in turn held repercussions for the way China conducted itself during the Cold War. As such, the US intelligence community relied to a notable extent upon intelligence reports from the

Intelligence Service in Asia During the Second World War’, *Modern Asian Studies*, 31:1 (1998), pp. 179-217.

²¹ Aldrich, *GCHQ*, p. 197.

British Embassy in Peking to fill a gap, while also receiving information from smaller states and lesser outposts.

This chapter therefore seeks to analyse the kinds of intelligence gathered in Peking, and by tracing its journey to its intelligence customers, evaluates its worth on a broader scale. Furthermore, it seeks to evaluate an episode of intelligence and diplomatic history that was especially violent in nature. Relative to similar stations in Hong Kong or Hanoi, where although the consular staff were faced with considerable hostility, but were not in immediate danger, in Beijing, intelligence gathering and observing was hampered by the constant, daily threat of violence. This raises an interesting paradox in comparison to Hanoi, where, despite an ongoing war and the city's strategic significance - particularly to the Americans - life for the British staff was comparatively stable, and innocuous. By contrast, in Beijing, conditions were far from favourable for the British when it came to gathering information. A powerful political undercurrent dictated attitudes towards the British; in addition to centuries-long anti-imperialism, an intense 'spy phobia' capturing Beijing's society was compounded by a general degree of xenophobia towards foreigners in the capital. This was perhaps epitomised in the embassy burning and subsequent loss of the cypher machine. As such, this meant that the British witnessed the events of the Cultural Revolution 'only darkly and fragmentarily at the time'.²² Nonetheless, as this chapter aims to show, the British were able to offer insights into a regime and society in the midst of turbulent –albeit temporary - change.

Diplomatic Encounters in the Forbidden City

During the late 1960s, the British Embassy's experience in Beijing oscillated curiously between the usual comforts of a diplomat's existence, and the violent upheaval of the Cultural Revolution. Located on the eastern outskirts of the old city, the British Residence and Office were two identical concrete villas near to the diplomatic compound in Beijing. According to Cradock, the British staff there lived

²² Cradock, *Experiences of China*, p. 37.

in 'reduced circumstances', the initial English Palace – originally the residence of a descendant of a Chinese Emperor – had been lost to the Chinese government, allegedly being used as offices for the Public Security Bureau (the local police).²³ Described as 'blank, ugly, virtually treeless', the new premises still boasted of luxuries usually afforded to diplomats, including a 'pleasant piece of garden, a swimming pool and swings for the children, and even two tennis courts'.²⁴ However, the changing atmosphere in Beijing could not have been further from the days of ostentatious parties at the Summer Palace 'at which boatmen towed the revellers over the lake as the sun went down', paper lanterns were lit, and dances held near the Dowager Empress's apartments.²⁵

Beijing itself was something of a 'walled city', in which the staff's movements were circumscribed, according to political dynamics. Described as the 'darker colours of the picture',²⁶ the staff were restricted to circulating only around the city centre, in which even several historical sites were out of bounds, 'though not clearly marked, so that we had regular brushes with the police'.²⁷ Although the staff were able to take trips to the Ming Tombs and Western Hills, and could dine at local restaurants and visit the International Club, driving had to be undertaken with care, given that 'a simple traffic infraction can easily become an ugly political incident'. Furthermore, travel to places outside Beijing had 'virtually ceased' by 1967, whilst travel to Canton and Hong Kong was often interrupted. Entry and exit from Beijing was therefore only possible for the British by air or train to Moscow, by train to Ulan Bator, or by air via Shanghai.²⁸ The only other British post in China was the Consulate in Shanghai, described as a 'town in itself', with lawns, law courts, a chapel, and rows of staff houses.²⁹

For most of 1967, the underlying hostility towards the diplomatic community in Beijing was partly dictated by the official regime, and partly by the attitudes of the revolutionary masses. In the case of the former, milder forms of deliberate antagonism were clear, such as the re-naming of the road housing both the British office and the North Vietnamese Embassy to 'Support Vietnam Street'. The

²³ Ibid, p. 22.

²⁴ TNA, FCO 21/33, Cradock (Peking) to Denson (London), 16th August 1967.

²⁵ Cradock, *Experiences of China*, p. 35.

²⁶ TNA, FCO 21/33, Cradock (Peking) to Denson (London), 16th August 1967.

²⁷ Cradock, *Experiences of China*, pp. 23-24.

²⁸ TNA, FCO 21/33, Cradock (Peking) to Denson (London), 16th August 1967.

²⁹ Cradock, *Experiences of China*, pp. 23-24.

British Chancery occasionally wrote to London to complain of various ‘pin pricks’ – essentially the same types of harassment that consumed other British diplomatic offices such as Hanoi. For example, the British staff were continually not invited to events which other members of the Diplomatic Corps were invited to, refused travel to Shanghai or other provinces to collect stores, and denied plumbing repairs to their premises.³⁰ Furthermore, although a certain degree of low-level hostility affected most foreign diplomatic offices in Beijing, Cradock pointed to a second group of problems that were particular to the British Embassy. The Chinese office and domestic staff serving the Embassy were ‘generally uncooperative’, to the point where they too participated in protests against the British Embassy itself.³¹ This corresponded with what Bolland described as an ‘unprecedentedly hostile campaign’ against Britain in Beijing and Shanghai, including ‘extremely insulting and slanderous’ propaganda against the British, and persistent discrimination against Hopson and his staff.³²

However, in 1967 the degree of hostility towards the British Embassy took on a somewhat more sinister tone. As a diplomatic outpost, Beijing was unique for the prolonged and outright levels of violence it experienced. The ‘violent turn’ of Beijing’s summer was due in large part to the Red Guards, who orchestrated and conducted most of the attacks on diplomatic premises. Thus, the British staff became witness to the more commonplace violence that tore at Beijing’s social fabric. As Cradock notes, ‘beatings and killings soon become common’, recalling ‘the noise of destruction, blows, cries, the sound of breaking glass and furniture’ he heard whilst at a party at an Indian colleague’s house.³³ Indeed, a thin partition was all that separated the diplomatic staff from the routine violence of the Cultural Revolution – though, by the summer of 1967, this partition had eroded almost completely.

The summer of 1967, epitomised what Cradock termed ‘the absurd violence in which we lived’.³⁴ Regularly subjected to direct and constant threats, the walls of the Chancery, Residence, and staff quarters were ‘liberally plastered’ with posters condemning the British (and Hong Kong)

³⁰ TNA, FCO 21/33, Hopson (Peking) to FCO (London), Memo, enclosed in Peters (Chancery, Peking) to Bolland (London), 7th June 1967; Peters (Peking) to Bolland (London), 1st August 1967, ‘Pin Pricks’.

³¹ Ibid, Cradock (Peking) to Denson (London), 16th August 1967.

³² Ibid, Bolland (London) to de la Mare (London), 5th July 1967, ‘The Future of the British Mission in Peking.’

³³ Cradock, *Experiences of China*, p. 40.

³⁴ Ibid, p. 76.

government, including slogans such as ‘the Debt of Blood will be Paid!’.³⁵ Hopson was threatened by foreign visitors at the Office who stated that they would ‘come back and burn your house and you in it’.³⁶ Furthermore, in June 1967 demonstrations gathered pace outside the office against supposed British support for the Six-Day War, which manifested a violent undertone. In addition to straw effigies often set fire to by demonstrators, crowds installed three almost life-size clay figures outside the gates of the Office, representing President Johnson, and the British Prime Minister ‘attached by ropes to General Dayan represented as a dog (presumably running) with a patch on its eye’, which the staff had to mount a covert operation to remove.³⁷ Moreover, a ‘motley crowd’ of ‘foreign experts’ including Arabs, Africans, Americans, and even some British nationals (supporters of Communist China) broke into the Office courtyard, breaking several windows, destroying the Queen’s portrait, tore up the Union Jack, and even attempted to set fire to a car. Having broken into a diplomatic reception, First Secretary and the senior SIS officer Blishen was ‘hit on the head and jabbed in the neck and stomach with a placard’, and had his car vandalised, only for it to be returned covered in political slogans painted on with oil paint, inside and out.³⁸ Violence was thus a regular feature of the British experience in Beijing.

Both scholars and officials involved in the embassy attack have also identified another key dimension to the politics of the embassy ransacking. By the end of 1967, the British staff’s movements were subject to new restrictions, effectively confined to an area consisting of the diplomatic flats, the remains of the Chancery Building, and the former residence – a sort of house arrest.³⁹ Although London reciprocated, applying the same restrictions to Chinese officials in London, enforced by Special Branch who followed Chinese diplomats about, this was maintained until the Foreign Office made a concessionary move – what scholars have termed ‘hostage diplomacy’ between the two sides. Rather than local politics, this was indicative of fraught relations between the British and the Chinese at a higher level. In effect, the Chinese were linking the British Embassy in Beijing with British conduct in Hong Kong, posing a dilemma for the Foreign Office; whilst London sought to extract its staff from

³⁵ TNA, FCO 21/33, Hopson (Peking) to FCO (London), Telno. 487, 16th May 1967.

³⁶ Ibid, Hopson (Peking) to FCO (London), Telno. 669, 10th June 1967.

³⁷ Ibid, Hopson (Peking) to FCO (London), Telno. 678, 12th June 1967.

³⁸ Ibid, Hopson (Peking) to FCO (London), Telno. 665, 9th June 1967; Peters (Peking), 21st June 1967, ‘Pin Pricks’.

³⁹ Cradock, *Experiences of China*, p. 73.

Beijing, it also needed to maintain British authority in Hong Kong, all whilst avoiding further provoking communist extremist activity in Hong Kong – which risked drawing China into the equation to support them.⁴⁰ Without exit visas, Cradock lamented that the British staff enjoyed a dual status – ‘diplomats in name, hostages in fact’.⁴¹ There were other precedents too; Frank Van Roosebroeck, a British national in Shanghai, had been held for around twenty years there because the bank he worked for ‘would not meet Chinese blackmail’. The arrest of a Japanese press correspondent in June 1967 underlined ‘the intensity of the current spy mania’.⁴²

The people who they were most anxious to extract were Tony Blishen, who had suffered concussion during the embassy attack, and his wife, who was dangerously ill. Ambassador Hopson was incensed about their ‘inhumane’ treatment and denounced the Chinese as ‘gangsters’.⁴³ It was partly to secure the release of the Blishens that the Foreign Office worked with MI6 to put counter pressure on the Chinese mission in London. MI6 were asked to make overt and visible efforts to recruit Chinese diplomats to make them uncomfortable and perhaps to engineer the withdrawal of some of their staff. MI6 thought that this would be difficult since the Chinese embassy in London was fortress-like and its staff well protected, but they tried their best. The Blishens were soon released, and, unusually for an MI6 officer, arrangements were made for Tony Blishen to talk to press on his return to London.⁴⁴

Britain had a more significant example that demonstrated how political relationships were able to hamper information gathering efforts in other parts of China. Having been subject to increasingly vociferous protests, in May 1967, the British Consulate in Shanghai experienced the violent undercurrent of the Cultural Revolution, supposedly orchestrated by Red Guards. What began as protests against the Consulate rapidly descended into an invasion of the premises; the Consulate Residence was vandalised by over-zealous protestors, and ended with Hewitt being hit by protestors with small, beflagged sticks, as his family hid in a laundry room.⁴⁵ Such was the ‘noise and venom’

⁴⁰ TNA, FCO 21/34, Murray (London) to Wilkinson (London), ‘British Mission in Peking and Policy towards HK’, 18th December 1967.

⁴¹ Cradock, *Experiences of China*, p. 73.

⁴² TNA, FCO 21/38, date unknown, 1967.

⁴³ TNA FCO 21/34, Murray minute, 18 December 1967.

⁴⁴ Ibid. Murray, Minute, 6th December 1967; private information.

⁴⁵ TNA, FCO 21/33, Hewitt (Peking) to PM (London) 29th June 1967; 1050711 - Hewitt (Peking) to PM (London) 29th June 1967.

that Hewitt, his family, and a member of staff sent from Peking to retrieve them were struck and spat upon en route to their plane. The attack bore political significance in that days after, the Chinese government publicly announced its decision to close the British post in Shanghai, which London was unable to rescind.⁴⁶

The incident was also a window into the political dynamics at play during the height of the Cultural Revolution. It seemed that London's interpretation of events in China put it at odds with those of its diplomatic staff on the ground; for example, Consul Hewitt – at the heart of the attack in Shanghai – understood the protest in its own political terms as it related British policy in Hong Kong, emphasising the 'indignation against Britain...apparent in every demonstrator's face.' By contrast, - and from a distance – the Foreign Office placed emphasis upon the role of the Cultural Revolution as the root of the disturbance, insisting upon the somewhat far-fetched argument that the Shanghai Office provided an 'excellent target to keep the revolutionary pot boiling without causing internecine strife'.⁴⁷ Bearing in mind the attacks on the Mongolians and Russians, it was clear that regardless of motivations, the Shanghai attack satisfied the Red Guard's 'taste for violence...which could be indulged in the name of nationalism'.

Spy Phobia

With this political context in mind, the general hostility towards the British also manifested a distinct degree of 'spy phobia'. This was evident not only from Chinese actions towards the British, but also from British perceptions of their own activities. Writing in 1968, as the chaos of the Cultural Revolution had begun to subside, subsequent staff members at the British Office noted the 'current spy mania' engulfing Beijing, visible through the increase in arrests and detentions of foreigners in the capital accused of spying.⁴⁸ Hunter attributed this to being one aspect of the 'Chinese xenophobia' that pervaded Beijing in 1967,⁴⁹ exacerbated to a considerable extent by the arrest and expulsion of an Indian

⁴⁶ Ibid, Hopson (Peking) to FCO (London), Telno. 559, 24th May 1967.

⁴⁷ Ibid, Memo, 'Shanghai: Mob Attacks and the Closure of the Office', 29th June 1967.

⁴⁸ TNA, FCO 21/14, Appleyard (Peking) to Wilson (London), 19th March 1968.

⁴⁹ TNA, FCO 21/13, Hunter (Peking) to Wilson (London), 2nd January 1968.

diplomat in June 1967 on charges of spying. The Chinese had accused the Indian Second Secretary, and subsequently a Third Secretary, of spying; the Indian Second Secretary Raghunath was accused of disguising himself as variously Nepali and Pakistani in order to penetrate into Chinese government offices.⁵⁰ Depriving him of diplomatic immunity by rescinding his diplomatic identity card, and thus status as a diplomat, the Chinese then carried out judicial processes against him,⁵¹ immediately creating an alarming precedent for foreign diplomats accused of espionage in the midst of the Cultural Revolution.

In this context, the loss of the British cypher machine during the attack on the British Embassy was even more troublesome. The reasons were twofold; firstly, it suggested that British self-perceptions were correct, in that the Chinese held suspicions of the British as spies and questioned the purpose of the post. Secondly, it suggested an element of cold warfare at play on the part of the Chinese. It was clear that the Chinese attack on the British Office was ‘not an irrational outburst of mob violence’, but a well-planned and coordinated operation by elements of the Red Guards. As London retrospectively learnt, such were Chinese suspicions of the British, that prior to the attack, the Embassy’s telephone lines had been cut, preventing other friendly offices from being able to send warning calls to the British staff.⁵² Both suggest that perceptions of intelligence ultimately lay in the eye of the beholder.

Both these issues were raised most interestingly through the theft of the cypher machine, but also the status of a map of Beijing accidentally left pinned to the wall of the safe room. In a key despatch to London detailing the Embassy’s ‘sins of omission’, Cradock observed that whilst the revolutionary masses had been given licence to destroy to the British premises, the secure zone of the Office – housing the DWS and cypher equipment - was ‘deliberately preserved from fire’. Furthermore, Cradock emphasised that the protestors who broke into the secure zone ‘were not indiscriminate criminals’, again highlighting that they had made for the rooms where the Chinese house staff had not been allowed. Aldrich observes that ‘mingled in with the revolutionary mob was a specialist team of Chinese code experts’, affirmed by the view of Blishen, who stated that particular protestors entering the embassy

⁵⁰ TNA FCO 21/29, Bolland (Head of Far Eastern Dept., FCO) to Private Secretary (London), 14th June 1967.

⁵¹ Ibid, Hopson (Peking) to FCO (London), Telno. 681, 12th June 1967.

⁵² FCO 21/34, Cradock (Peking) to Denson (London), 29th August 1967.

‘knew exactly what they were looking for’.⁵³ In fact, it transpired that in addition to the Rockex cypher machine having been stolen, a few technical items, including Astro and CEI receivers were stolen, as were two cases of DTMS defensive anti-bugging equipment, though he noted that these may have been burnt during the attack. Noting a ‘further mark of selectivity’, Cradock drew attention to the fact that the DWS room, housing much bulkier Piccolo cypher equipment, was left alone, apart from a ‘perfunctory attempt at burning by flinging in an oil lamp’.⁵⁴

This aspect of the embassy raid takes on particularly significance in the context of what scholars have called ‘embassy wars’. As previously discussed, DWS operators also worked in effect as ‘forward collectors’ for GCHQ, placing such communications security personnel at ‘the forefront of secret battles between the embassies’. This rendered the DWS both an offensive *and* defensive organisation, in combining a ‘multitude of curious tasks that were at the gritty interface of technical and human espionage’.⁵⁵ However, it also presented a vulnerability; if other embassy precedents were anything to go by, the Soviets were ‘almost certainly aware’ of the British practice of using the DWS for the short-range monitoring of communications from embassies.⁵⁶ For example, in 1964 the Soviets attempted to use a low-frequency radio beam to induce a malfunction in a teleprinter in the code room of the British Embassy in Moscow. This caused a small fire, necessitating a response from firemen, some of whom were in fact bugging technicians from the KBG’s sigint department.⁵⁷ Thus, whilst the DWS held an important intelligence function, it may also have been a point of vulnerability to the Chinese.

The other item of interest – or, perhaps, fluster – to both sides was revealing of attitudes to do with ‘spy phobia’. The other key ‘sin of omission’ was that amidst the commotion of the attack, the map of Beijing on the wall of the strong room became an ‘oversight’; though it was hidden behind curtains, the Cradock and Hopson had forgotten to remove it, having focused upon removal of all classified documents into the safe room first, and staff safety as the attack worsened and staff safety became the

⁵³ Ibid, Cradock (Peking) to Denson (London), 29th August 1967; Aldrich, *GCHQ*.

⁵⁴ TNA FCO, 21/34; Hopson (Peking) to FCO (London) via French channels, 24th August 1967 – Hopson noted that ‘one cypher machine and manual is missing’, not found in the wreckage of the cypher room, and assumed to have been removed by Chinese hands.

⁵⁵ Aldrich, *GCHQ*, p. 192.

⁵⁶ Ibid, pp. 189-190.

⁵⁷ Ibid, p. 193.

primary concern. Although the map was little more than an outdated street map identifying government buildings, factories, and railways, the British Embassy was all too aware that if fallen into Chinese hands, the map's only use would be 'evidence' if Beijing decided to level charges of espionage against the British staff. What exacerbated this scenario was the fact that the map was marked Secret, and of United States' origin.⁵⁸ This did not go unnoticed by London either; requesting a full report of the attack from Cradock, Secretary of State Rodgers had 'particularly asked' about the status of the map left in the safe room.⁵⁹ It was thus clear from both British and Chinese perceptions that the Embassy was tinged with a hint of intelligence gathering, whether the accusations were valid or not.

Information Insecurity

Prior to the attack, the embassy enjoyed a speech safe room designed to resist bugging. Speech security was precarious at best for the British Embassy in Beijing following the attack, and this held significant repercussions for a core function of the post: intelligence gathering. This applied not only to the security of classified material that was passed between London and the Beijing Office, but also to retaining the very communication channels that made such intelligence exchange possible. It is here that the impact of the attack on the British Office was the greatest, creating deep repercussions that jeopardised the post's utility, and by extension, its very existence, exacerbating what Cradock described as 'the precariousness of existence here'.⁶⁰

The preparations made by the British Embassy in anticipation of an attack by the masses made it clear that maintaining information security – however fragile – was of the utmost importance. This was a particularly delicate issue given the climate of hostility between Britain and China. Both London and the British Embassy made frequent references to destroying files upon warning of an impending attack, in order to prevent sensitive material falling into the hands of the Chinese.⁶¹ Such an environment

⁵⁸ TNA FCO, 21/34; Hopson (Peking) to FCO (London) via French channels, 24h August 1967.

⁵⁹ Ibid, de la Mare (London) to Samuel (London), memo, 7th September 1967.

⁶⁰ TNA, FCO 21/33, Cradock (Peking) to Denson (London), 16th August 1967.

⁶¹ See FCO 21/33.

therefore lent even further gravity to ensuring no trace was left behind of sensitive British documents, or anything incriminating.

Accordingly, the Foreign Office had prepped the Embassy staff well when it came to rapidly - though perhaps not efficiently - destroying sensitive material. In the aftermath of the Embassy ransacking, although the strong room had remained intact, so did the classified papers it had withheld during the time of the attack. Whilst some of the staff attempted to destroy the papers in coal-burning stoves, burning bulk papers required other methods. Cradock recalled a futile effort involving a 'remarkable chemical compound' provided to him by the Foreign Office; according to instructions, 'this only needed to be scattered on the files, left for a period with the doors closed', and upon return, the staff would find a 'tidy pile of ashes, all secrets consumed'. Yet, in reality, the powder did little - having employed it as instructed, the staff simply discovered the files 'neatly charred around the edges, rather like funeral stationery, but still perfectly legible'. Moreover, an unforeseen side-effect hindered efforts even further, as the powder had generated rather 'powerful and tenacious fumes'. According to Cradock, this meant that the only way to retrieve the files was for each staff member to 'wrap a towel around his face, plunge into the gas chamber, seize the nearest file, and get out before succumbing'. Taking on a greater sense of emergency in the aftermath of the embassy burning, Whitney even slept with a device, described as an 'incendiary deed box' nearby, intended to consume its contents in a crisis, whilst at the same time emitting a high-pitched whistle. Cradock commented that he had 'the same faith in it as the incendiary powder'. Given the high priority afforded to maintaining information security, ultimately, the bulk documents were resigned to being burnt in perforated petrol drums, an 'old-fashioned, but effective' technology.⁶²

Fortunately, records have survived that detailed the kinds of classified material to be destroyed by Embassy staff. Examining the documents at hand in the British Office offers some clues as to what was at stake. In light of a threatened 'take-over' by the Chinese at the British Consulate-General in Shanghai, for example, Consul-General Hewitt had immediately begun to destroy files, of which he kept a list detailing what had been destroyed, to be passed onto London. Amongst documents on visas,

⁶² Cradock, *Experiences of China*, pp. 67-69.

security reports on individuals, and observational reports on China (including its industry, politics, agriculture, and everyday life) kept in Shanghai, were a range of more sensitive documents relating to intelligence collection and security. For example, the 'Guard' procedure detailed criteria for which documents *not* to pass onto the Americans; other documents detailed 'security and security equipment'; codes and cyphers were amongst some of the most sensitive documents to be destroyed, particularly in the context of losing the Rockex machine later that year; the latest Foreign Office Security Memorandum was destroyed; and lastly, local intelligence reports, as well as documents relating to the Joint Intelligence Bureau were amongst those destroyed.⁶³

However, other reasons underpinned the decision to destroy the documents with such immediacy. As previously mentioned, underlying tensions between the Chinese government and the diplomatic corps present in Beijing were suspicions of espionage by the foreign community, unaided by the arrest of an Indian diplomat in June 1967 on accusations of spying. As such, it was a real concern of the British that discovery of any of their sensitive material in the event of an attack could incur accusations of espionage against their staff, or at the very least, as an excuse for detention, imprisonment, or expulsion (as was the case with the Indians). In addition to the aforementioned documents, cypher machine, and the troublesome map, American sensitivities also factored into the decision to destroy the documents with such immediacy. Nigel Trench, for example, had noted to the Foreign Office a conversation with the Director of Asian Communist Affairs in the State Department in June 1967, in which the latter enquired into the fate of British archives in Shanghai following its shuttering, given that the Consulate-General there would have had custody of a 'certain quantity' of US papers.⁶⁴

Importantly, the loss of the cypher equipment and destruction of the Office seriously jeopardised the Embassy's ability to report to and exchange intelligence with London. The loss of secure communication channels was twofold; firstly, the British Embassy was seriously impeded in its capacity to receive and store classified material from London and other British stations. Just as in Shanghai, the

⁶³ TNA, FCO 21/33, Cradock (Peking) to Denson (London), 'List of Files Destroyed in Shanghai on 27th January 1967.

⁶⁴ Ibid, Trench (London) to Bolland, (London), 2nd June 1967.

staff engaged in a 'crash burning programme', quickly destroying all classified files that had survived the attack. As a total last resort, the files were to be removed to the strong room of a friendly Embassy ('probably Dutch'). Book cyphers and one time pads for laborious hand encypherment were also destroyed, and the emergency DWS equipment transferred out of the compound and into friendly keeping.⁶⁵ Using 'every available burning device', this was undertaken to the extent that according to Cradock, there was nothing left that could have been of incriminating or intelligence value to the Chinese.⁶⁶

Retaining equipment and documents posed the greatest challenge in the days immediately following the attack. Almost a month after the embassy's destruction, the staff were operating out of Whitney's diplomatic flat as a makeshift office, and such was the poor nature of the office's speech security that the only room shut off from their Chinese servants was used as a registry. Illustrating how vulnerable the Embassy's security was, the only cypher pads and book were kept in an incendiary deed box kept by Whitney's bed, whilst the only classified material they felt able to retain safely was held in a 'foolsafe envelope' that was to be carried off in the Duty Guard or Chancery Guard's pocket, and if need be, left for safe-keeping with a friendly mission.⁶⁷ Such was the impact upon the Embassy's information security that until at least the end of 1967, the staff destroyed most incoming telegrams and letters after reading them, and did not keep copies of outgoing correspondence other than a registry book. In essence, London did not send any material marked Top Secret to Beijing, and Beijing did not retain papers classified as 'Secret' or above. Files were destroyed so quickly after reading that an internal memo from the Diplomatic Service Administration circulated to all departments noted that the Beijing office was 'relying upon simply the collective memory' of the Embassy as so little of importance was recorded or filed.⁶⁸

⁶⁵ TNA, FCO 21/34, Hopson (Peking) to FCO (London), Tel unnumbered, 25th August 1967.

⁶⁶ Ibid, Cradock (Peking) to Denson (London), 29th August 1967.

⁶⁷ Ibid, Cradock (Peking) to Denson (London), 13th September 1967.

⁶⁸ Ibid, Cradock (Peking) to Denson (London), 13th September 1967; TNA, FCO 21/29, Hopson (Peking) to FCO (London), 12th October 1967; Wilson (London) to Ball (Comms. Dept., London), memo, 26th October 1967; TNA, FCO 21/34, Diplomatic Service Administration Office (London) to All Posts and Departments, 6th October 1967, 'Communications with Peking'.

The other core risk posed by the loss of the cypher machine was that in order to maintain a basic level of communication with London, the Embassy had to rely upon the communication channels of friendly missions. Not only did this affect the content that could be sent over such channels, but also exposed the British to charges of espionage if detected by the Chinese; writing to Beijing, Murray, for example, warned of caution in sending en clair telegrams to Beijing, noting that one report was sent through a DWS channel, 'which China doubtless monitor'.⁶⁹ Furthermore, although the British Embassy still had recourse to commercial telegraphic channels, and mail channels, these were 'easily intercepted by the Chinese', who knew that the British had not used their own cyphers since the attack upon the embassy. Although in early September 1967, the Diplomatic Wireless Service was on the point of re-establishing a cypher link, having renewed contact with the Embassy in Beijing,⁷⁰ the Embassy's capacity to send and receive classified files was seriously hampered. To circumvent this major obstacle, London therefore used the 'consortium bag' – a shred diplomatic bag - operated by the Dutch and Scandinavians (particularly the Norwegians), which was exchanged in Moscow, to get sensitive material to Beijing.⁷¹ This essentially creating a means of getting material to Beijing using the Norwegians' regular weekly bag facilities.⁷²

Furthermore, until the British Embassy had managed to get their own communication channels back up and running again to full capacity, telegrams to and from Peking were being transmitted by a 'friendly mission' – the French.⁷³ Using particular prefixes on telegrams that indicated the use of French channels,⁷⁴ this practice – however temporary – raised all sorts of security risks for the British and their allies. As it narrowed circulation of the telegrams even further to a strict 'need-to-know' basis, this

⁶⁹ TNA, FCO 21/29, James Murray (FCO, London) to Hopson (Peking), 5th October 1967.

⁷⁰ Ibid, Shepherd (Comms. Dept, London) to Denson (FED, FCO, London), 8th September 1967.

⁷¹ Ibid, Scott (Oslo) to FCO (London), Telno. 274, 1st September 1967; TNA, FCO 21/34, Bolland (London) to de la Mare (London), 'Burning of the British Office in Peking', 11th September 1967.

⁷² TNA FCO 21/31, Hopson (Peking) to FCO (London), Telno. 20, 28th August 1967.

⁷³ TNA FCO 21/30, FCO (London) to Polad (Singapore), Telno. 896, 5th September 1967.

⁷⁴ Ibid, FCO (London) to Peking, FOPEK 1 (via Paris no. 2932), 29th August 1967; TNA, FCO 21/29, Reilly (Paris) to FCO (London), Tel no. 883, 1st September 1967. The prefix 'FOPEK' indicated telegrams passing through French channels to Beijing, whilst the prefix 'PEKFO' indicated telegrams passing from Beijing to London via French channels. A statement was attached to the top of each telegram stating 'the greatest care should be taken not to make known more than necessary the fact that such messages are being transmitted to and from Peking on our behalf'.

meant that key allies – most notably the Americans and Canadians – were not in the know.⁷⁵ Moreover, within the Quai d'Orsay (the French Foreign Ministry) itself, knowledge of the practice was highly restricted; observing the 'strictest secrecy', copies of British telegrams passed to them only went to two recipients in the Quai, and overall knowledge of the link was confined to only five diplomatic officers, which included the Secretary-General, and Manac'h (Director for Far Eastern Affairs). Additionally, the Quai was careful not to distort its normal signal pattern in wireless communication with Beijing (so as not to give away British use of the channel), which passed through two routine schedules at midday.⁷⁶ Although a partial cypher link (of a limited capacity) was established via Singapore by mid-September, and a full cypher link restored by late October 1967,⁷⁷ the British continued to make use of the French channel, allowing it to cope with the full volume of material being sent its way.

Paranoia at the risk of leak was high. Though happy to lend its channels to the British, the Quai d'Orsay was 'scared stiff of a leak', underlined by the fact that the French political leadership in the Elysée itself was not aware of the practice! Furthermore, various clues pointed to the fact that individuals within the American and Canadian embassies in Paris had figured out British use of the French link. Moreover, in discussions between different embassies, the British were aware that the French Embassy in Beijing was passing on material (such as newspapers) to allied Governments, 'the study of which, as you know, would...constitute espionage in Chinese eyes', and implicate the British.⁷⁸ Despite the caution taken, London experienced a few minor embarrassments at the hands of close allies. For example, the Canadian Third Secretary revealed to Campbell that he knew about the 'help' the French were giving the British, whilst a 'less than friendly' American colleague at the American Embassy in Paris accused the British of receiving telegrams through these channels.⁷⁹

However, the loss of cypher channels in Beijing following the attack on the Embassy also revealed another aspect to intelligence exchange between allies. In the attack's immediate aftermath, it

⁷⁵ TNA FCO 21/30, FCO (London) to Polad (Singapore), Telno. 896, 5th September 1967.

⁷⁶ TNA, FCO 21/29, Fielding (Paris) to Denson (FED, FCO, London), 2nd September 1967, 'Communications with Peking'; Campbell (Paris) to Denson (FCO, London), 1st September 1967.

⁷⁷ Ibid, Denson (FED, FCO, London) to Campbell (Paris), 16th October 1967; Shepherd (Comms. Dept, London) to Denson (FED, FCO, London), 8th September 1967.

⁷⁸ Ibid, Campbell (Paris) to Denson (FED, FCO, London), 5th October 1967.

⁷⁹ Ibid, Campbell (Paris) to Denson (FCO, London), 1st September 1967; Denson (FED, FCO, London) to Campbell (Paris), 16th October 1967.

seemed at moments that British-French proximity was stronger than the UK-US alliance when it came to exchanging information. For example, immediately following the Embassy attack, London had relied upon French material that they were able to glean from Red Guard sources ‘which are unavailable to us’, via Paris.⁸⁰ Moreover, correspondence from the Foreign Office implied at this delicate juncture a closer alliance between the British and French in Paris; part of the reason for keeping such strict information security over British use of French cypher channels was so as not to undermine British trustworthiness in French eyes. This was underlined in a discussion between British staff in Paris and London; maintaining secrecy at that point was vital so as not to ‘imperil whatever marginally extra things the French may be ready to give us and not the Americans’.⁸¹

London’s reaction was also noticeable for the somewhat ill-conceived responses it considered in the aftermath of the Embassy attack. Though these were, for the most part, unworkable based on resources, or sheer political feasibility, it reflected the Foreign Office’s anxiety as to the future of the British Embassy in Beijing. For example the loss of cypher channels to and from Beijing prompted London to consider sending ‘dummy’ telegrams (false, undecipherable telegrams) to Beijing in order to deceive the Chinese.⁸² Additionally, Rawalpindi even made the suggestion that the Beijing office use the Pakistanis to send messages to London, thus involving a third country.⁸³

Perhaps the most unconventional idea, involving the Secret Intelligence Service (SIS) was to consider using Ho Chi Minh to exercise his influence with the Chinese.⁸⁴ Though labelled by de la Mare as ‘so dicey and problematical’ to the point that Ministers may rule it out as hopeless, the Foreign Office considered exploiting a degree of leverage that Britain had over Ho Chi Minh; a British lawyer, Loseby, had prevented his extradition from Hong Kong in the 1930, giving him status as a political refugee and preventing his release to the French. The French wished to try him, and almost certainly would have

⁸⁰ TNA, FCO 21/30, FCO (London) to British Embassy (Paris), Telno. 3098, 15th September 1967.

⁸¹ TNA, FCO 21/29, Campbell (Paris) to Denson (FED, FCO, London), 5th October 1967.

⁸² Ibid, Hopson (Peking) to FCO (London), Telno. PEKFO 11, 7th September 1967.

⁸³ Ibid, Commonwealth Office to Rawalpindi, Tel. no. 1109, 1st September 1967.

⁸⁴ On this fascinating episode see Dennis Duncanson, ‘Ho-Chi-Minh In Hong Kong, 1931–32’, *The China Quarterly* 57:1 (1974), pp. 84-100. See also Heather Streets-Salter, ‘The Noulens Affair in East and Southeast Asia,’ *Journal of American-East Asian Relations* 21:4 (2014), pp. 394-414; Christopher Baxter, ‘The Secret Intelligence Service and China: The Case of Hilaire Noulens, 1923–1932,’ *Britain in Global Politics*, 1:1 (2013), pp. 132-152.

executed him. In London's eyes, the British justice system therefore prevailed; 'it is therefore not too much to say that Ho owes his liberty, and perhaps his neck, to us'. The British had quietly allowed Ho Chi Minh to flee Hong Kong and run away over the border into China. Weighing different means of approaching him, including through Brian Stewart, and MI6 officer serving as Consul-General in Hanoi, it then transpired that Loseby had passed away earlier that month. Temporary excitement turned to disappointment and one official minuted: I understand Mr Loseby is dead and that the idea must die with him'. His colleague added: 'Yes R.I.P. for the project'.⁸⁵

The American Intelligence Appetite

Despite the various obstacles and environment in which the British Embassy operated, it still managed to produce valuable secret intelligence. However, British intelligence gathering from Peking was framed by broader geopolitical tensions between Britain, the United States, and China. In fact, as suggested by scholars such as Aldrich and Ruane, China was a thorn in the side of the Special Relationship. China's political and military intervention across Southeast Asia, manifested through its military aggression, military assistance, and propaganda, 'linked all trouble spots' across Asia, but it was Britain and America's diverging foreign policy responses to China's intervention that caused a rift between allies. Whilst Britain sought a more neutral approach to dealing with China, the US sought to contain China using all means possible short of war, including subversive activity and covert operations as seen in Hong Kong. The latter's provocative approach in China had been a longstanding source of tension with Britain, the dynamics captured perfectly in Nitze's statement from 1951 that the UK '...fears that we [America] have a secret policy in the Far East – namely, to overthrow Peiping' [Peking].⁸⁶ As Ruane argues, since 1949, China had therefore been 'a major irritant' in Anglo-American relations in the region.⁸⁷

⁸⁵ TNA, FCO 21/34, de la Mare (London) to Rodgers (London), 'Evacuation of Peking Staff', 13th September 1967; Denson (London) to Bolland (London), 21st September 1967.

⁸⁶ Aldrich, *The Hidden Hand*, p. 293.

⁸⁷ Ruane, *Containing America*, p. 145.

Yet, just as in Hong Kong, and later in Hanoi, Britain's approach to foreign policy and intelligence gathering offset the 'diplomatic divergence' between the two allies. This occurred on two levels: firstly, Britain's official recognition of China granted it access to territory the Americans lacked access to. Secondly, Britain's placement of intelligence officers in specifically diplomatic outposts afforded Britain access to a broad spectrum of intelligence, ranging from diplomatic reporting to covert material gathered secretly. This proved to carry a significant advantage in political terms, as it lent the Americans eyes and ears into the heart of Peking. And indeed, London hoped, perhaps helped Washington see China through British eyes. As this section aims to show, several factors rendered the intelligence valuable: its content gave it considerable value to defence intelligence agencies in both London and Washington; its context – the Cultural Revolution – lent a richness to the material as it emanated from the heart of Beijing; and finally its use by its respective intelligence 'customers' indicated its worth, particularly with regard to the 'Special Relationship' between the UK and US in Asia.

It is worth pausing to note the extent to which Beijing was a veritable blind spot for the Americans. Despite a sizeable intelligence presence in Hong Kong (in the American Consulate), they lacked a human presence on the ground in Beijing in any form – diplomatic or intelligence-based. Importantly, this was compounded by a marked contraction in the technical forms of intelligence that they gathered. In 1968, the US effectively abandoned its capacity to conduct imagery intelligence (IMINT) gathering owing to growing political tensions with the Chinese government. The dynamics with China were of such a fragile, if somewhat volatile nature, that overhead reconnaissance flights conducted by drones had inflamed already fraught political relations. According to a memo sent to intelligence representatives on the US 303 Committee, an oversight and planning committee for covert operations, the level of drone reconnaissance over South China, combined with the frequency of 'inadvertent overflights' of the Chinese border by American pilots bombing North Vietnamese targets, had been perceived by China as somewhat provocative. As a measure of de-escalation, the Johnson administration thus ceased overhead drone flights over China; as the memo stated, with the exception of satellites, 'no overhead reconnaissance has been conducted over mainland China since 27th March

1968'.⁸⁸ Although the Americans retained a degree of IMINT through satellite imagery, their intelligence diet was further starved of another key source of information on Beijing. As will be discussed later, this was of particular importance when it came to gathering defence-related intelligence material.

The British Embassy in Beijing was therefore a key point of interest for some members of the US intelligence community, in producing raw material from the raucous capital of Beijing, above all during the height of the Cultural Revolution in 1967. It was clear through correspondence from numerous British stations across Asia that the US had a palpable intelligence deficiency when it came to China, generating an appetite for material from Beijing. In early January 1967, for example, the British Embassy in Seoul received a request from the Americans there for information on current developments in China, the top US official there having stated that, 'quite frankly...they are completely in the dark about the significance of present developments in that vast country'.⁸⁹ The British Embassy in Washington made a similar observation in relation to the Cultural Revolution; Gilmore commented that '...the American Government's knowledge of day-to-day developments and their ability to influence events is so limited as to dictate continued official silence' when it came to policy regarding China.⁹⁰

This pointed, in particular, to the crucial human element of the British reporting from Beijing. Whilst the US Consulate-General provided a steady stream of signals intelligence (sigint) from its monitoring station in Hong Kong, and received some human intelligence (humint) from travellers and refugees passing through the area, it lacked a reliable means of assessing the credibility and validity of information in Beijing. Bolland had remarked upon the same issue for the British, highlighting a report on the difficulty of assessing events in China due to 'the lack of reliable information in a rapidly moving and complicated situation', and the fact that most of the information available in China, even for those on the ground, was either official party line, or gathered from posters, which were themselves 'often

⁸⁸ *US Department of State, Foreign Relations of the United States, 1969-1976, Volume XVII, China, 1969-1972, Document 10, 'Aerial Reconnaissance over Communist China – Political Factors', March 14th 1969. Available at <https://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1969-76v17/d10>.*

⁸⁹ TNA, FCO 21/30, Rainsford (Seoul) to Denson (London), 25th January 1967.

⁹⁰ TNA, FCO 21/8, Gilmore (Washington) to Wilson (London), 11th January 1967, 'The Cultural Revolution'.

contradictory and misleading', and propagandistic in nature.⁹¹ This therefore raised real issues of source reliability and information validation, for which the Americans were heavily reliant upon the British. Stewart, for example, noted the manner in which Washington was 'avid for reliable news from China', the Johnson administration being 'particularly grateful for what we can pass on to them (not least, of course, because it is more reliable than most of what comes their way)'.⁹² In practice, this was reflected in individual instances where an agency such as the CIA would ask the Foreign Office if it could confirm stories in Beijing it had heard rumours of. A typical example was a Tass report (Russian media, and thus prone to distortion), which reported slogans posted up in Beijing calling for the overthrow of all who opposed Mao – the British Embassy responded confirming that it had not seen such posters, and advised taking such reports with a pinch of salt, given that Tass was the source.⁹³

This anxiety over information validation was reflected, to some extent, in Washington's informal intelligence requests or requirements, often sent in an informal manner to both London and Beijing (usually through correspondence). Having discussed the Red Guards with the Americans, Wilson relayed to Beijing that they were 'naturally very anxious to lay their hands on as much Red Guard material as possible'; Beijing consequently sent copies of Red Guard newspapers to the US Consulate in Hong Kong.⁹⁴ Similarly, the British Embassy in Washington affirmed to London a notable demand – not just amongst the American intelligence community, but also academics and museum directors – for 'some reliable feel of the human background to whatever is happening in China'. As will be discussed later in consultations between the British Embassy staff and the US defence and intelligence community in Washington, key questions surrounded basic issues on what daily life was like in Beijing.⁹⁵

Taking into account the American demand for material out of Beijing, the transmission of information between the two allies gives us a useful profile of the dynamics of the Special Intelligence Relationship. Writing to the Foreign Office, Trench confirmed the informal arrangements that

⁹¹ TNA, FCO 21/9, Bolland (London) to SecState (London), 26th January 1967, 'The Present Situation in China'.

⁹² TNA, FCO 21/30, Stewart (Washington) to de la Mare (London), 11th January 1967.

⁹³ TNA, FCO 21/491, Boyd (London) to Walden (Peking), 11th February 1969.

⁹⁴ TNA, FCO 21/30, Wilson (London) to Whitney (Peking), 15th February 1967.

⁹⁵ TNA, Ibid; Stewart (Washington) to de la Mare (London), 11th January 1967.

characterised intelligence exchange from Beijing to the Americans, affirming that ‘we pass on to the Americans practically all the reporting which comes our way from Peking’, either copied and passed directly to the US State Department, US Information Agency (USIA), and Central Intelligence Agency (CIA). In cases where greater restriction was needed, material was copied directly to an officer in the State Department, known to be the ‘more discreet’ of the agencies.⁹⁶ As will be discussed later, the material from Beijing proved to be of particular military value, and arrangements were therefore made for greater intelligence exchange with the US Defence Intelligence Agency (DIA), reflecting the fact that defence intelligence was burgeoning on both sides of the Atlantic. Liaising with the Defence Intelligence Staff (DIS) in London, Fradd stated that it was ‘in London’s interests to maintain and further liaise with US intelligence on China’, particularly after a recent visit. Until that point in early 1967, the DIA confided to Air Marshal Harold Maguire, the head of DIS, that they had never seen any of the Beijing material; the passage of information had thus far been ‘distinctly a one-way business’, with the DIA passing to London ‘very good summaries of current intelligence from Vietnam’. Trench described the intelligence liaison with the Americans at technical levels as ‘productive and well worth fostering’;⁹⁷ as such, it was decided that the UK Military Representative in DIS would pass Beijing material directly to DIA.⁹⁸

Intelligence Gathering in Beijing

Although there was usually at least one SIS officer present in Beijing during the 1960s, there were few attempts to run agents from the Embassy. The security risks made such a plan close to hopeless. Agent missions into China were run from more secure locations including Delphi, Singapore, and Hong Kong. During the late 1960s, the SIS officer in Beijing was Tony Blishen, holding the rank of First Secretary.

⁹⁶ FCO 21/30, Trench (Washington) to Bolland (London), 13th March 1967, ‘China: Transmission of Information to the Americans’.

⁹⁷ Ibid.

⁹⁸ Ibid, Fradd (London) to Bolland (London), 21st March 1967, ‘China: Transmission of Information to the Americans’.

This was not his first tour in a ‘secret town’: in the 1950s he had been the junior SIS officer at the station in Vienna, and had undertaken various forms of Cold War espionage. But in Beijing, his experience as an intelligence observer was valued, but he was rarely called on to carry out real ‘special operation’ of the kind that required formal approval in London, nor did he do much agent running.⁹⁹

Instead, the intelligence material to emerge from Beijing was largely a mix of human observations, translations, and information evaluated from official material. In this respect, its value derived largely from the human element in selecting such information – then analysing and evaluating official material, somewhat in contrast to the Americans’ reliance upon the more technical intelligence collated in Hong Kong. This carried special importance with regard to official material put out by the Chinese leadership – information garnered from newspapers, posters, and press summaries often were replete with distortions, deception, and of course, propaganda. Nonetheless, the Sinologists in the British Embassy – were thus crucial in offering analysis from the capital, at a time of sheer political chaos and instability.

British reporting on China’s internal situation was a key source of intelligence at the peak of the Cultural Revolution in 1967-68. The tone of the reports varied, from generalised observations on everyday affairs at the heart of Beijing, to detailed discussion of leadership, personalities, political rumours, and policy. Satiating the American appetite for impressions of daily life in Beijing, the reports contained assessments of the Cultural Revolution as a movement and general information on ‘what life in Peking [Beijing] looks like’, which London relayed as being the material of greatest use.¹⁰⁰ George Walden, for example, an official stopping over in Canton *en route* to Hong Kong, reported on a stroll he took through the town to sample the general atmosphere amidst a flurry of revolutionary activity. Gauging an ‘atmosphere of normality tinged with pregnant tension’, he observed the manner in which loudspeaker ‘screamed abuse’ at political opponents late into the night, parades of people in dunce’s caps took place through the streets surrounded by ‘strikingly hostile crowds’, and lorry loads of workers’ rebels roamed the streets.¹⁰¹

⁹⁹ Private information.

¹⁰⁰ Ibid, Wilson (London) to Whitney (Peking), 22nd September 1967.

¹⁰¹ TNA, FCO 21/21, Walden (Hong Kong) to Wilson (London), 20th February 1967.

Against the political backdrop, in which official news and information from the Chinese regime was both constrained in content and nature, these observations provided a useful means of gauging the everyday impact and extent of the Cultural Revolution. Although travel for the British staff was limited, just as the Chinese sought to constrain their footprint within Beijing, their movements still yielded some insight into the impact of the Cultural Revolution upon ordinary Chinese citizens, and the failure of governance in the countryside. For example, Cradock, who would later rise to be one of the most distinguished chairs of the Joint Intelligence Committee, recalled a journey from Canton to Beijing in the winter, observed passing ‘the bleak evidence of failure, smokeless factories, and walls covered with exploded slogans’. He pointed out that the most striking feature of the journey was the shortage of food; he was served meals in his train compartment, not being allowed to enter the dining so as not to see the ‘desperate nature of Chinese rations’, noting that, for ordinary Chinese, food was simply ‘cabbage and a little rice, with virtually no meat’. The impact was clear in Beijing, where he observed Chinese students eating ‘the buds and bark of trees’, also noticing local staff being near collapse.¹⁰²

In political terms, despatches from Beijing provided considerable insight into the organisational chaos of the Cultural Revolution. Uncovering the different dynamics at play between political factions, supposed takeovers versus real takeovers of power and infighting, the reporting shed light on the power structure – or rather, the corrosive forces impacting China’s power structure.¹⁰³ Cradock, for example, relayed to London how, although the Central Committee still issued political directives, it was ‘merely a façade’, behind which lay individuals in the Politburo, Military Affairs Commission, and Cultural Revolution Group, who exerted the real influence. Below this, he stated that the provincial party and state machinery were ‘in a state of disintegration’, rendering the Army the ‘only reliable instrument for transmitting and executing instructions’.¹⁰⁴

There was a certain uniqueness for the British staff in being able to observe the changes taking place from the epicentre of the Cultural Revolution. Labelling the period one of ‘great interest and excitement’, Cradock understood the importance of being ‘in the presence of a greater historical

¹⁰² Cradock, *Experiences of China*, p. 26.

¹⁰³ TNA, FCO 21/8, Cradock (Peking) to Wilson (London), 31st January 1967.

¹⁰⁴ Ibid.

convulsion'... 'a movement whose course I understood and which I could analyse and report'.¹⁰⁵ Importantly, he stated that, despite the obstacles it created, the Cultural Revolution essentially punched holes in the 'screen normally interposed between the Chinese authorities and their foreign guests', asserting that the British were 'increasingly being supplied with information by the revolutionaries themselves' through posters. Their access to information grew, as Cradock pointed to increasing reports appearing that were critical of government and Party leaders, 'apparently drawing on privileged or secret material'. Although written by Red Guards, these leaks 'clearly came from much higher, presumably the Cultural Revolution Group itself', allowing the British a vital window into higher-level politics.

Being at the heart of Beijing therefore presented unique opportunities for gauging the convulsions Chinese experienced both politically and socially. Despite the potential for the information to be distorted, given its sources, as Cradock underlined, 'in a tightly closed society, where any information, however harmless, was secret, such revelations were pure gold'.¹⁰⁶ Indeed, the extent to which almost any solid information about China was 'intelligence' reflected the nature of closed societies, which are hard to imagine in the post-Cold War period, except for North Korea. This degree of access not only enabled the British staff to attain information normally closed to the foreign community, but also 'to virtually all Chinese'. Moreover, these kinds of observations served two key purposes: firstly, they rendered the internal workings of the Communist state and body politic 'briefly visible' – a degree of access not only denied to most of the foreign community in Beijing, but also 'to virtually all Chinese'.¹⁰⁷ Secondly, it offered a window into the psychology of the Cultural Revolution, in terms of the mind-set, strains, and day-to-day pressures of a country undergoing rapid change. For Cradock, under such conditions, 'the downward potential of human nature was brutally exposed'; stating that however much their observations 'confirm the darkest views of human nature, or evoke cynical laughter, it was nevertheless a unique insight'.¹⁰⁸

Away from the more human side of the Cultural Revolution, higher-level political intelligence gleaned from diplomatic circles was of particular value, especially seeing as certain other nationalities

¹⁰⁵ Cradock, *Experiences of China*, pp. 44-45; 90.

¹⁰⁶ Ibid, p. 45.

¹⁰⁷ Ibid, p. 90.

¹⁰⁸ Ibid.

had closer relationships to the Chinese. As Cradock noted, the Western Europeans did not have much business with the Chinese, ‘nor, I fancy, did we have a deep insight into what was going on in the government or the Party’ alone. Although the British Chargé met Chen Yi, the Chinese Foreign Minister, ‘very occasionally’, usually meeting with no higher than a vice foreign minister, Cradock added that ‘the real leaders were out of reach’.¹⁰⁹ Information gleaned from other foreign diplomats was therefore vital, as they were able to divulge more sensitive information the regime otherwise sought to conceal. As with Hanoi, a subject explored in the next chapter, contact with diplomats from other Eastern Bloc countries was especially valuable and some were surprisingly friendly. For example, the Embassy learnt from the Poles of a ‘special farm’ where Chinese functionaries would go to carry out stints of labour reform, and found out the ‘uneven’ nature of rectifying and rebuilding the Party once the Cultural Revolution had passed, through information a Chinese official had let slip to the Rumanians.¹¹⁰ Such was the appreciation for the ‘excellent and useful reports’ on the internal situation, that Wilson, writing from London, expressed to the Embassy that the information London received from Tokyo, Washington, and Paris ‘amounts to little, and is nothing compared to what you can give us from Peking’.¹¹¹ This was remarkable praise, given the constrained circumstances of figures like Cradock and Blishen.

Remarkably, the sources of greatest value were often official regime posters. Indeed, this was crucial to British intelligence gathering in Beijing. The Embassy staff – and Sinologists in particular – extracted a substantial amount of detail from the posters; typical items of interest included the dynamics within the Peking leadership, such as who was being attacked by Maoists and scapegoated, who key players (such as Chou En-lai) allied with and when, and which leadership figures in the provinces were safe or under attack. Moreover, the staff were also able to gauge levels of regime propaganda, as well as the Chinese leadership’s own perception of the internal situation, especially in the countryside.¹¹² Furthermore, the posters provided a constant wealth of information on revolutionary dynamics. In a report typical of the prevailing ‘unruliness’ at the height of the Cultural Revolution in March 1967,

¹⁰⁹ Cradock, *Experiences of China*, p. 24.

¹¹⁰ TNA, FCO 21/491, Walden (Peking) to Boyd (London), 15th February 1969.

¹¹¹ TNA FCO 21/30, Wilson (London) to Whitney (Peking), 22nd September 1967.

¹¹² TNA FCO 21/21, Appleyard (Peking) to Wilson (London), 4th April 1967.

Weston detailed the palpable lack of law and order in Beijing caused by revolutionary groups. This included numerous instances of fights, gang warfare, vandalism, ransacking of factory and business premises, and the appropriation of vehicles and equipment, at the same time shedding insight on inter-group rivalries.¹¹³

The privileged nature of the information contained in posters was also clear from the attitudes and reactions of the Chinese leadership, indicating an awareness of the value they provided. As Ray Whitney observed in a letter to London, an edict issued by the Party forbade the publication in posters, handbills, or any other documents, of ‘secret material’ on the Cultural Revolution, or Party information that had not already been released.¹¹⁴ Additionally, the sheer volume of posters gave clues as to the fervency of the revolution. Situating the posters alongside the broader political context, the volume and production of the posters themselves was also revealing of local dynamics. Discussing the decline in posters in a despatch to London, Whitney directly related their decline to the ‘continued dampening of the movement’ – not in terms of its zeal, but in suggesting that the provincial revolutionaries might have found themselves at odds with the local military force.¹¹⁵ Yet, it is worth noting that harvesting information from the posters brought with it substantial risk; particularly in light of the arrest of the Indian Chargé in June 1967, going past posters to gather information, near demonstrations, or in the vicinity of military areas required ‘special caution’, for fear of being charged with conducting espionage.¹¹⁶

London frequently received full translations of the posters, and this was where the SIS Sinologist stationed in Beijing – Tony Blishen – was key. His practice was often to attach a copy of the original text from posters, as well as his translation, and subsequent analysis and evaluation in a letter to the Foreign Office. A notable example is a poster published by Ching kangshan, the media organ of the Red Guards of Peits and the Workers’ University, translated by Blishen, which contained the text of Mao’s first big-character poster in 1967. Blishen and the staff had known of the poster’s existence since the previous year, but never before discovered a copy. Its importance lay in how extensively it

¹¹³ Ibid, Weston (Peking) to Wilson (London), 1st March 1967.

¹¹⁴ Ibid, Whitney (Peking) to Wilson (London), 15th March 1967.

¹¹⁵ Ibid, Whitney (Peking) to Wilson (London), 1st March 1967.

¹¹⁶ TNA, FCO 21/33, Cradock (Peking) to Denson (London), 16th August 1967.

had been quoted (albeit without attribution) in speeches and editorials since the summer of 1966, noting that ‘many of the other phrases have now become household words’. Furthermore, the poster revealed a political attack on a high-level individual, and encouraged its readers to ‘bombard the headquarters!’ of various counter-revolutionary activists.¹¹⁷ However, their clear informational value brought accusations of spying to the foreign community. Following expulsion of two Indian officials for being ‘too assiduous’ in their examination of the posters, the British had to adapt to how they accessed the posters. Cradock recalls that diplomatic cars were after that point seen ‘making strange deviations’ in the main streets so that the occupants could view the posters from the car whilst driving past.¹¹⁸

The other core source of intelligence material gathered by the British – and subject of special interest in the United States – were Chinese press summaries, and copies of newspapers, including Red Guard newspapers. During the Cultural Revolution, these became rarefied items, increasingly difficult to access by foreigners in the capital. Nonetheless, in addition to internal reporting and information from across China, the summaries were useful in providing a reading of the ‘degree of emphasis’ the official Chinese propaganda machine placed upon internal and external policy.¹¹⁹ Usually bought from young Chinese boys touting them, the newspapers were effectively contraband, and thus open to inviting charges of espionage. Nonetheless, for the British, Percy Cradock’s wife Birthe was a ‘chief supplier’ of them, going about town quietly on her bicycle, and returning ‘well-padded’, having stuffed several layers of newspapers under her coat.¹²⁰ Illustrative of the insight into official information that the British were able to gather, in a comment upon their use of sources, Denson noted how a report on the New Year’s Day editorial in the *People’s Daily* newspapers was ‘generally an authoritative policy document’. Providing some indication of future policy trends in China, at least for upcoming months, from the British estimation in Beijing, in the Cultural Revolution’s wake, 1968 seemed to be a ‘year of putting Humpty Dumpty together again’.¹²¹

¹¹⁷ TNA, FCO 21/21, Blishen (Peking) to Wilson (London), 12th April 1967.

¹¹⁸ Cradock, *Experiences of China*, p. 45.

¹¹⁹ TNA, FCO 21/30, Wilson (London) to Appleyard (Peking), 3rd March 1967.

¹²⁰ Cradock, *Experiences of China*, p. 45.

¹²¹ TNA, FCO 21/13, Denson (London) to de la Mare (London), 9th January 1968.

These summaries received a wide circulation, often being forwarded to the Information Research Department (IRD) in the Foreign Office, the Joint Research Department (JRD), and the Permanent Under-Secretary's Department (PUSD), as well as other British stations in Asia.¹²² Passing on material such as copies of the *Reference News Bulletin* received from friendly missions, or provincial newspapers (confidentially gained on a 'see-and-return basis' through a member of the Bulgarian Embassy), the newspapers would be photographed, and the film sent to the Regional Information Office – a sub-section of the SIS in Hong Kong – for processing and distribution.¹²³ Red Guard newspapers held particular importance; having previously mentioned American anxiety to see as much Red Guard material as possible, once passed to Hong Kong, the US Consulate-General made further copies of the newspapers 'for their own use'.¹²⁴

Beijing recognised their value as a source of information – Whitney, an aficionado of propaganda, referred to these newspapers as 'in a number of ways better than Peking's posters'.¹²⁵ Their worth was also clear from their demand; although after the attack on the British Embassy, processing such material placed a burden upon the staff due to limited resources, Boyd emphasised that the British station in Hong Kong may feel differently about stopping the circulation of newspapers 'owing to the Americans'.¹²⁶ Gathering the Red Guard newspapers brought substantial risks, however. One source of the Red Guard newspapers was the French Embassy in Peking, which passed them onto allied governments. In light of the British cypher machine loss and subsequent use of French communications channels, as well as the general air of 'spy phobia' that gripped Beijing, the discovery of possession of the newspapers posed serious consequences for the diplomatic staff. The British Embassy in Paris was all too aware of the potential security risks concerning the newspapers, acknowledging that 'the study of which, as you know, would, on the part of e.g. our own Embassy in Peking, constitute espionage in Chinese eyes'.¹²⁷

¹²² TNA, FCO 21/30, Boyd (London) to Whitney (Peking), 20th May 1967.

¹²³ Ibid, Hopson (Peking) to FCO (London), Telno. 227, 23rd February 1967.

¹²⁴ Ibid, Walden (Peking) to Boyd (London), 26th August 1968.

¹²⁵ Ibid, Whitney (Peking) to Wilson (London), 1st February 1967.

¹²⁶ Ibid, Walden (Peking) to Boyd (London), 26th August 1968.

¹²⁷ TNA, FCO 21/29, British Embassy (Paris) to Denson (London), 5th October 1967.

There were also some basic physical obstacles to intelligence gathering in Beijing. The diplomatic community in Beijing lived a somewhat separate, sheltered existence to the Chinese; though they were able to walk around on the ground amidst rallies, demonstrations, and other revolutionary activity, there was still a clear disconnect between their existence and that of the local Chinese population. Cradock, for example, lamented the ‘literally non-existent contacts with Chinese here’ in a despatch to London, though it did not deter him from striving to provide reporting on the ‘human background’ of the Cultural Revolution.¹²⁸ Similarly, drawing upon Curzon’s description in the 1890s of the Chinese as a ‘hard-limbed, indomitable, ungracious race’ due to their nationalistic history, Denson mentioned the ‘frustration which any diplomatist feels when trying to penetrate the political and psychological wall the Chinese have built around themselves’.¹²⁹ The physical and psychological constraints therefore had a direct upon the scope and content of the intelligence that could be collated in Beijing.

This problem was further exacerbated by frequent instances of deception or misinformation that the British were less-equipped to gauge. Taking into account the lack of Chinese contacts or networks that might have been able to help validate or cross-reference information, this raised questions about information reliability. Discussing miscellaneous pieces of information he had gathered, including a report on the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) Congress, Walden, for example, noted that ‘we have no means of assessing the accuracy of this report’. The even greater problem, however, was disinformation. This bore upon rumours from other members of the diplomatic community in particular; having heard a ‘somewhat unconvincing story’ from a Bulgarian source about the appearance of anti-Mao leaflets in Beijing, of which twenty to thirty thousand copies were said to have been printed, Walden acknowledged that ‘this may be a routine piece of Russian disinformation’, but lacked the means of confirming this to be so.¹³⁰

Disinformation also had somewhat embarrassing consequences for the British too. Weston had sent a rather animated letter to London regarding a tabloid pamphlet on military conscription he had

¹²⁸ TNA, FCO 21/30, Cradock (Peking) to Denson (London), 15th February 1967.

¹²⁹ TNA, FCO 21/441, Denson (Peking) to Stewart (London), 3rd June 1969, ‘China Re-Visited’.

¹³⁰ TNA, FCO 21/491, Walden (Peking) to Boyd (London), 3rd February 1969.

been shown by the Indian Embassy, which aroused some interest in London. However, the reply he received came as a surprise – the US Consulate-General in Hong Kong had been offered the same pamphlet to purchase. Before committing to buying it, however, through conducting paper chemistry tests, comparing typefaces with those commonly used in China, and carefully examining the style of text, they had discovered the document was a ‘clever forgery’. Although the Americans had a ‘good deal of experience’ in distinguishing between forgeries, the incident illustrated the dangers of collecting swathes of printed material in an environment in which information and knowledge were the prime currency. This was affirmed in McLaren’s reply to Weston, in which he drew attention to the ‘market here for almost any printed material emanating from the Mainland’, adding that the production of forgeries was a ‘thriving industry’.¹³¹ Indeed this was a problem wherever basic economic and social information about closed societies was in high demand, since the market seemed to produce excellent forgers: western intelligence agencies responded by producing ‘burn lists’ of scoundrels known to be selling forged wares.¹³²

Lastly, Chinese information security measures proved to be a real obstacle to the British officers. Against the backdrop of Beijing’s ‘spy phobia’, the Chinese had in place active counter-measures to restrict access to various material to the foreign diplomatic community. For example, around the time of the embassy attack, the Chinese took steps to prevent the British from reading posters and getting hold of local newspapers, as well as other intelligence material. This threw the future of the British Embassy into even further jeopardy, in terms of the utility of the post, given that the staff size had already been reduced in the attack’s aftermath.¹³³ Tight Chinese security of their communications channels was another key obstacle to the British, in terms of intelligence gathering. Whilst the Soviets used one-time pads for their cypher communications, a relatively security communications system, they and the Chinese also made extensive use of landlines for communication. These could only be

¹³¹ TNA, FCO 21/20, McLaren (HK) to Weston (Peking), 15th July 1968.

¹³² H. Keith Melton, Henry Robert Schlesinger, Robert Wallace, *Spycraft*, (London, 2009), p. 312.

¹³³ FCO 21/34, Bolland (London) to FCO (London), ‘The Future of our Mission in Peking’, 27th July 1967.

intercepted 'with great difficulty',¹³⁴ thus posing a significant challenge to British attempts at gathering short-range signals intelligence intercepts.

Nonetheless, the other core aspect of the value British intelligence from Beijing provided was information of a military nature. It was here that the observations brought balance to the technical feed of intelligence the Americans relied upon in China as a whole, through human reporting and gathered printed material which included considerable detail on military equipment, installations, and indications of war preparations in the countryside. Furthermore, through liaising with DIS in London, who provided specific intelligence requirements in some instances, the Beijing material was then forward to their American counterpart – the DIA, particularly after Trench institutionalised a more formal means of intelligence exchange in 1967.

As limited as travel outside of Beijing became for the British Embassy staff around the peak of the Cultural Revolution, their movements still yielded observations and details of a military nature. In despatches typical of the sorts of reporting that Beijing was able to provide, Davies, for example, connected clues of blasting operations in the hillsides of Canton with mention of the supposed construction of air-raid shelter tunnels mentioned by travellers passing through Lowu, thus alluding to military installations and preparations in the countryside.¹³⁵ The networks of sources that the British staff were able to establish with people passing through Beijing also generated surprisingly precise details of military value. Walden recounted to London details from a French source as to the movement of anti-aircraft guns in the direction of Beijing,¹³⁶ and through information obtained from a commercial source, was able to provide DIS with a rolling-mill for possible aerospace application, and the specific computers delivered to the city of Taiyan, including the exact model numbers.¹³⁷

Being members of the diplomatic community in Beijing also proved its utility, as some of the British staff members were able to siphon military details from speaking with friendly military attachés. Through liaising with the French, Indian, and Rumanian military attachés, for example, Allen reported back to London all sorts of details including on Chinese infantry (the inadequacy of anti-tank

¹³⁴ Aldrich, *The Hidden Hand*, p. 343.

¹³⁵ TNA, FCO 21/492, Davies (Peking) to Boyd (London), 27th August 1969.

¹³⁶ TNA, FCO 21/481, Walden (Peking) to Pierce (London), 23rd September 1969.

¹³⁷ Ibid, Laughton (Peking) to Pierce (London), 29th July 1969.

equipment), the Air Force (aerial training, night flights), tanks (production, models and marks, protection from nuclear fall-out, and their firing systems), artillery, and industry (steel importation).¹³⁸ Brian Stewart, another SIS officer stationed in Beijing during the 1960s, recalls effectively behaving as a military attaché, having to attend meetings with military generals, and collecting open source material, such as photographs of tanks and artillery at National Day celebrations.¹³⁹ He emphasised an ability to absorb details of a military nature, such as being able to recall and draw the entire Chinese creek along the Ussuri River – the site of one of the most serious Sino-Soviet border clashes in the late 1960s – pinpointing the locations of rusty frigates, and covertly taking photographs of submarine factories disguised as temples.¹⁴⁰ Printed material also provided some insight as to details that technical intelligence would have otherwise been unable to discover. An excellent example was one of Whitney's letters on the translation of a poster in Beijing in July 1967, which reported the existence of a 'Scientific Intelligence Department' modelled on a Russian unit of a similar name, whose function was to 'procure, translate, and disseminate scientific information'.¹⁴¹ Observations from posters and official publications also gave insight into the Maoist framework behind military policy, through knowledge gained of the specific Maoist policies underpinning things such as military training and professionalism.¹⁴²

The Dynamics of Intelligence Exchange

The value of the British material became clear through Beijing's exchanges with its recipients both in London and in Washington. However, it also revealed a limited degree of exchange in the opposite direction, in which Beijing was both intelligence supplier and customer. In London, DIS's appreciation of the intelligence material was clear; Appleyard noted to Beijing that their reporting had 'aroused a good deal of interest in military circles here', adding that 'there is a seller's market for this kind of

¹³⁸ Ibid, Allen (Peking) to Wilson (London), 'Service Attache's Views', 18th November 1969.

¹³⁹ Stewart, in discussion with author, November 2014.

¹⁴⁰ Ibid.

¹⁴¹ TNA, FCO 21/21, Wilson, handwritten comment, 28th July 1967 - noted that one of Whitney's letters on posters from 22nd January (papers were held up in a delay).

¹⁴² TNA, FCO 21/481, Walden (Peking) to London (no date).

information', whilst Denson told Beijing that DIS 'have an interest, as you know, in nearly all your reports'.¹⁴³ As such, DIS often sent to Beijing both formal and informal intelligence requests, with increasingly specificity. Usually liaising through Lieutenant Colonel Pierce, DIS would request greater reporting on areas such as air defence in relation to surface-to-air missile (SAM) coverage, the appearance of additional gun sites (with locations), types of gun, the presence of fire control radar equipment, convoys, unit sizes, and uniforms.¹⁴⁴ Activity related to Sino-Soviet rivalry aroused particular interest; DIS requested detailed requirements on air defence, the army (such as sightings of Soviet troops and border guards), the border itself (in terms of security arrangements on the Russian side, including layout and size), and lastly, rail activity (train wagons, light tanks, personnel carriers), all of which could shed insight as to political tensions and subsequent military preparations between the two.¹⁴⁵

But the arrangement flowed the in opposite direction too. Just as DIS sought to gain tailored intelligence from Beijing, so too did the British staff in Beijing seek material from DIS in London, in order to ameliorate their own observational capacity. Having already held a copy of the US Department of Defence's brief on the Chinese Navy, Beijing requested further 'recognition material' from DIS in London that would better enable them to identify and recognise military equipment and activity, given the Embassy's position to witness such activity at the heart of Beijing.¹⁴⁶ London was more than happy to oblige – in response to Beijing's demand for information on aircraft, tanks and armoured vehicles, artillery, and personnel weapons, Goss in DIS stated that 'we very much value your military reports here....and we must ensure that you have essential background and reference material'. As a result, Goss arranged for Technical Intelligence (in the Army) to produce a 'concise technical brief with photographs of equipment and weapons' specifically for Beijing.¹⁴⁷

Beijing occasionally benefitted from receiving material from the Americans in a similar, albeit informal, way. In response to a letter from Beijing, in which Appleyard had gleaned information on

¹⁴³ Ibid, Appleyard (London) to Allen (Peking), 18th December 1969; TNA, FCO 21/30, Denson (London) to Peking 30th April 1968.

¹⁴⁴ TNA, FCO 21/481, Pierce (DIS, London) to Chancery (Peking), 16th October 1969.

¹⁴⁵ Ibid, Murray (London) to Peking, Telno. 253, 29th July 1969.

¹⁴⁶ Ibid, Chancery (Peking) to Goss (London), 25th November 1969, 'Recognition Material'.

¹⁴⁷ Ibid, Goss (Intelligence Corps, DIS, London) to Chancery (Peking), 17th December 1969.

National Day celebrations but lacked the political roles of various Chinese mid to high-level officials, the DIA produced a list of information on the names provided, thus setting the context.¹⁴⁸ Despite its limited capacity to store sensitive material, Beijing also received copies of the National Intelligence Surveys prepared by the CIA, only retaining especially valuable copies.¹⁴⁹ Moreover, in the aftermath of the attack on the British Embassy, the tide was somewhat reversed; uncertainty plagued the future of the post, and until the fate of the Embassy could be decided, London sought to elicit as much information as possible from the Americans on Chinese internal policy (through the British Embassy in Washington), until Beijing's reporting capacity was restored.¹⁵⁰ Furthermore, London and Washington informally agreed that in light of the decreased flow of information from Beijing, to 'rely upon a reverse flow from them', particularly on developments in China relating to decisions over Hong Kong. Nevertheless, the latter was limited utility, as the London had 'more or less total access to American intelligence anyway'.¹⁵¹

The Special Intelligence Relationship

The Americans' effective 'blind spot' in Beijing afforded considerable value to the British intelligence gathered there. As previously discussed, the United States lacked any diplomatic representation in the Chinese capital, and this rendered the political coverage from the British Embassy useful not only to better gauge political relations, but also to understand what Bolland described as the 'anarchic state of Peking'¹⁵² as the Cultural Revolution unfolded. Significantly, for the US defence and intelligence community, the quality of reporting and material received from the British Embassy was a means of

¹⁴⁸ TNA, FCO 21/39, Wilford (Washington) to Wilson (London), 6th November 1967. This included the Director of the General Office of the National Defence Ministry, and leading PLA officers stationed in Beijing.

¹⁴⁹ TNA, FCO 21/491, Walden (Peking) to Boyd (London), 5th March 1969.

¹⁵⁰ TNA, FCO 21/30, Wilson (London) to Gilmore (Washington), 6th September 1967.

¹⁵¹ Ibid, Gilmore (Washington) to Wilson (London), 28th August 1967, 'Destruction of Chancery in Peking'.

¹⁵² TNA, FCO 21/34, Bolland (London), internal memo, 'The Future of our Mission in Peking', 27th July 1967.

accessing more reliable and validated information. At a time when Chinese diplomatic relations with the Western world as a whole were unsettled, this lent greater imperative to understanding Chinese political and military dynamics through whichever means possible. In this context, the Americans' appreciation of the British intelligence was clear. Not only was it expressed both formally and informally through diplomatic channels, but the various mechanisms of intelligence exchange – primarily consultations with staff from the British Embassy in Beijing – revealed how the British material plugged a vital hole in information on Beijing. As this final section discusses, in Beijing, British intelligence up close was not only superior to American 'intelligence at a distance', but also contributed to Britain's superiority in the 'Special intelligence Relationship' in Asia by shaping the views of some of the American agencies.

Through diplomatic channels, the Americans often expressed messages of support and appreciation for British reporting in Beijing, particularly in the extended aftermath of the embassy attack in August 1967. Expressing his admiration for the British staff, given the 'disadvantages and pressures' under which they had been working, even prior to the attack, Deputy Assistant Secretary of State Berger confided to London that the Americans' view of the Red Guards and accompanying events in China had 'largely been through the eyes of Her Majesty's representatives in Peking' [Beijing], and requested a subsequent round of informal talks on China with London.¹⁵³ If Berger demonstrated the resonance of British reporting within the State Department, there were parallels within other agencies too. Attending a Commonwealth Liaison Officers meeting in London in April 1968, Bolland commented upon the subtle infiltration of British reporting into American views. Remarking upon a briefing by a CIA officer on internal developments in China since August 1967, he observed that the views expressed by the American were 'already on record, and which he based, as far as recent events are concerned, to a large extent on reports from our Embassy in Peking'.¹⁵⁴

Taking into account the value of military information the British reported from Beijing, the US defence establishment also made clear the value the British intelligence was held in high esteem.

¹⁵³ TNA, FCO 21/24, Berger (Deputy Assistant Secretary of State, Washington) to de la Mare (London), 1st August 1967.

¹⁵⁴ TNA, FCO 21/25, Bolland (London) to Richards (Cab, London), 3rd April 1968.

Expressing their ‘great appreciation for the quality of the reporting’ they received from Beijing via DIS, the acceleration of their intelligence requests reflected not only their absorption of the material, but their own deficiencies in intelligence gathering. This was most notably in the latter half of 1968, where the upsurge in their requests extended to rather obscure areas; amongst their requests were information on the burden on the economy posed from the advanced weapons programme, food supply and availability, birth rates and birth control measures, the probability of a new Leap Forward programme, private plots, and the effect of the Red Guards on transport, industrial production, and education.¹⁵⁵

In fact, such was the utility of the reporting to the Americans that it weighed upon the FCO’s decision not to close the post following the attack. Initially, Murray, the Head of the Far Eastern Department had favoured this option. Although political turmoil in Hong Kong certainly dominated discussions on the Mission’s future, commenting from the British Embassy in Washington, Wilford asserted that in addition to HMG’s own interests, the Americans ‘set a very high value on the reporting which they get...of the Peking scene’. Whilst maintaining the post certainly served the Foreign Office well, he ardently reiterated his belief that if the Americans thought London might close the Beijing Embassy, ‘they would do all in their power to persuade us not to do so’. To this, another British official commented that ‘full weight’ should be given to such considerations.¹⁵⁶

Yet, the clearest way in which the value of the British intelligence manifested itself was through Anglo-American consultations over China. Held regularly during the course of the Cultural Revolution, Murray described them as amongst some of ‘the most useful’ consultations London engaged in.¹⁵⁷ Taking place under the auspices of either the Foreign Office in London, or the State Department in Washington, the consultations involved representatives from a range of departments, including defence intelligence officials (DIS and DIA), the British IRD and American INR (Bureau of Intelligence and Research), the White House, and of course, a representative from the British Embassy in Beijing. In

¹⁵⁵ TNA, FCO 21/30, Newbury (London) to Chancery (Peking), 14th February 1967.

¹⁵⁶ TNA, FCO 21/43, Wilford (Washington) to Murray (London), 5th February 1968.

¹⁵⁷ FCO 21/39, Murray (London) to Wilkinson (London), ‘UK/US Talks on China’, 20th May 1968.

most cases, an intelligence representative from the SIS or CIA would also attend, in the British case usually acknowledged as ‘a representative of ‘the Friends’’.¹⁵⁸

Although the Americans had access to a considerable amount of material on China, the value of the British intelligence was clear; as Murray affirmed, it was the ‘special knowledge we gain from our position both in Peking and Hong Kong’ that set the material apart.¹⁵⁹ This became evident from the content of the consultations held, which though they may not have led to specific policy outcomes, displayed a degree of intelligence liaison over the British reporting. The consultations often centred on a piece of research or intelligence report produced by a particular department (such as the 1968 US National Intelligence Estimate on ‘The Short-Term Outlook for Communist China’, or an INR study on the Cultural Revolution)¹⁶⁰, which were used as the basis for a generalised discussion, usually around different political aspects of the Cultural Revolution.

Intelligence also reveals the dynamics at play between the two allies; whilst, on the whole, they saw eye-to-eye on the majority of issues, occasionally a minor disagreement indicated differences in institutional approach, that were in part to do with the direct experience the British had from Beijing. In talks held in October 1967 on the Cultural Revolution, London and Washington disagreed on the then more moderate phase of the Cultural Revolution campaign; the US believed this was a tactical phase, or rest period, whilst the UK saw it as a longer-term shift in the movement.¹⁶¹ However, Denson noted this disagreement to be minor, emphasising ‘no great divergence between the Americans and ourselves’ on China, and pointing to the fact that more noticeable differences of opinion lay between two elements of the US team – representations of the Current Intelligence team in CIA, and the rest of the American contingent.¹⁶² Cradock made similar observations on his trip to Washington in 1969, in which he found

¹⁵⁸ TNA, FCO 21/440, Murray (London) to Tomlinson (London), 4th August 1969, ‘Anglo-American Talks on China’. For more information on attendees, see the following documents: TNA, FCO 21/39, de la Mare (London) to Chief Clerk, PUS (London), 6th October 1967; Wilford (Washington) to Murray (FCO), 31st May 1968; TNA, FCO 21/440, Murray (London) to Tomkins (Washington), ‘Anglo-American Talks on China’, 21st August 1969.

¹⁵⁹ TNA, FCO 21/39, Murray (London) to Wilkinson (London), ‘UK/US Talks on China’, 20th May 1968, letter.

¹⁶⁰ TNA, FCO 21/39, Murray (London) to Wilford (Washington), 16th July 1968; de la Mare (London) to Chief Clerk, PUS (London), 6th October 1967.

¹⁶¹ TNA, FCO 21/24, Wilson (London) to de la Mare (London), ‘Talks with the United States on China’, 2nd November 1967.

¹⁶² Ibid.

that both sides' general estimates of the Cultural Revolution and internal situation were 'not far apart'. Nonetheless, he was still able to perceive noticeable differences in perspective over the Chinese leadership; the CIA gave greater weight to the power and succession struggle within the Chinese leadership than London believed there to be, whilst the CIA, DIA, and State Department were all more inclined than Cradock to doubt the power that Mao exercised over his group, and by extension, over events after the Cultural Revolution.¹⁶³

By contrast, Anglo-American consultations in October 1969 were more divergent. Both sides discussed the ongoing Sino-Soviet border dispute (including topics such as its background, leadership, escalation, and how it bore upon Anglo-American interests, etc.). Yet, Boyd noted his team having come across views on the internal situation in China that struck them as 'distinctly over-optimistic', concerning the definitive and somewhat early end to the Cultural Revolution. In what seems to have been a common observation in other consultations, Boyd added that the Americans 'seemed to be casting around desperately for evidence to prove this thesis'.¹⁶⁴

London's critical and sometimes superior tone also pervaded its internal discussions of American reports that it received. The Foreign Office would often discuss with its Beijing staff written reports or intelligence estimates that it received from Washington (usually authored by the State Department or CIA), where the differences in the two allies' understanding of the Chinese leadership was clearly visible. Commenting upon a leaflet on developments in Chinese education prepared by the US Consulate-General in Hong Kong, for example, London was much more cautious in its estimate of how education had been impacted by the Cultural Revolution, and what the different attitudes towards educational policy were amongst the leadership.¹⁶⁵ These disagreements occasionally took on a somewhat sharper note; picking out flaws in a CIA assessment of local disturbances in China being instigated by the more radical elements of the Chinese leadership in Beijing, Wilson faulted the CIA for relying upon only one Red Guard newspaper as its main source. Furthermore, he pointed to a key divergence between their two perspectives; just as in the consultations, where London differed with the

¹⁶³ TNA, FCO 21/23, Cradock (Washington) to Bolland (London), 6th June 1967.

¹⁶⁴ TNA, FCO 21/440, FCO (London), 'Anglo-American Consultations: Washington, 7-8th October 1969', Brief, 2nd October 1969.

¹⁶⁵ TNA, FCO 21/39, Boyd (London) to Wilford (Washington), 21st July 1968.

Americans was in the latter's assumption that those dissatisfied elements of the leadership amounted to a solid, covert opposition force.¹⁶⁶

Following their respective periods in the British Embassy in Beijing, both Cradock and Hopson were invited to Washington for consultations at a much more intimate level. Both spent the majority being received by the US defence and intelligence community in Washington, usually spending a whole day at the CIA, and at least half a day consulting with DIA, whilst also speaking with officials in the State Department, and a few academics.¹⁶⁷ In Hopson's case, he met with the Director of the DIA, and gave a general briefing to around forty DIA officers. Lending special attention to the PLA and Cultural Revolution, the range of topics covered was revealing of the areas the US sought further depth in when it came to intelligence; focusing on the relationship between the revolutionary committees and Beijing's central authority, tensions within the Beijing hierarchy, the cult of Mao, the effects of the Cultural Revolution upon the PLA, and operational capability were key areas of discussion.¹⁶⁸ In fact, such was the demand in the US for intelligence from Beijing that Secretary of State Dean Rusk sent a message to London personally requesting reports from Hopson upon his return from China.¹⁶⁹

Cradock's trip to Washington was of a similar vein, though his post-trip remarks were more reflective upon the state of US intelligence on China. Attending meetings with the Office of Asian Communist Affairs in State Department, the Bureau of Intelligence and Research, the intelligence agencies, and even the Board of National Estimates (which prepared US National Intelligence Estimates), Cradock discussed the political, economic, scientific, and technical development related to China, as well collections of publications his staff had amassed. At DIA, he had lunch with a White House staffer covering China, in which he underwent a period of 'intensive questioning'.¹⁷⁰

His trip also provided some insight as to the overall weakness the US faced in making its own intelligence assessments regarding Beijing. Significantly, although he found the Americans to be 'very thorough', professional, and possessing excellent resources and equipment for their assessments on

¹⁶⁶ Ibid, Wilson (London) to Denson (London), 13th February 1968, 'East Wind versus West Wind'.

¹⁶⁷ TNA, FCO 21/440, Wilford (Washington) to Murray (London), 25th April 1969.

¹⁶⁸ TNA, FCO 21/35, Wilford (Washington) to Murray (London), 9th October 1968.

¹⁶⁹ Ibid, Dean (Washington) to FCO (London), Telno. 2472, 15th August 1968.

¹⁷⁰ TNA, FCO 21/23, Cradock (Washington) to Bolland (London), 6th June 1967.

China, he concluded that ‘they did not seem substantially better informed than we are’, adding that they lacked ‘new striking pieces of information to contribute’. From the intelligence agencies in particular, the topics he discussed unveiled clear gaps in their understanding that lent the British material an ever degree of importance. From discussing loyalties to Mao, to potential divisions within the Army, Cradock noted considerable interest and questions on life in Beijing, especially the ‘methods of collecting the information made available to us by ‘extensive democracy’’, adding that the Americans ‘rely much on the material we relay to them’. ¹⁷¹ What US reliance upon technical intelligence therefore failed to provide was an understanding of the intricacies of life at the centre of a hostile regime; noting the ‘voracious appetite for anything bearing upon life in Peking’, the British material ultimately filled gaps on what Cradock referred to as its ‘most simple, bread and butter aspects’ of life in Beijing.¹⁷²

Conclusion

Having been stationed in Beijing for three years – though not seemingly all that long – Cradock wrote that ‘time counted twice in the Cultural Revolution’. Marred by the ‘demands of a post running under siege conditions’, the daily presence of violent threats - if not violence itself - and the pressures of living in a ‘demented environment’, Beijing’s feverish nature took its toll on the British staff.¹⁷³ Although the British outpost yielded an abundance of observations, political reporting, and military intelligence on China, it remained trapped in an ‘Alice-in-Wonderland world, governed only by its own mad logic’.¹⁷⁴

The British experience of intelligence gathering from its diplomatic post in turbulent Beijing was revealing of two core dynamics. Firstly, it underlines the notion that understanding what ‘intelligence’ is: to a degree, it is defined by its customers and its opposition, rather than the actual form or content of the intelligence itself. The Beijing experience demonstrated that both China and the United States perceived of and treated almost all the British information and material to emerge from Beijing

¹⁷¹ Ibid.

¹⁷² Ibid.

¹⁷³ Cradock, *Experiences of China*, p. 90.

¹⁷⁴ Ibid.

as a form of intelligence collection. Not only did the loss of cypher communication channels transform almost all Britain information gathering a covert process because of the difficulties of moving this out of China, but also the ‘spy phobia’ that took hold of Beijing increased the value of even the most mundane information, not only because it constrained life in the capital, but also because the Cultural Revolution was a matter of endless fascination for policy-makers in the West. Washington’s appetite for more data – authentic data – was insatiable.

Secondly, the value given to the British reporting by the American defence and intelligence community demonstrated Britain’s upper hand in gathering intelligence from ‘blind spots’ in Cold War Asia. When it came to justifications for the post’s existence both before and after the attack on the Embassy in August 1967, numerous reasons pointed indirectly to the Embassy’s importance relative to the US. The Americans’ reliance upon a diet of satellite imagery over China, and reports from its substantial Consulate-General in Hong Kong were unable to offset the direct value of what was effectively a ‘listening post’ at the heart of Beijing.¹⁷⁵ In fact, London’s reasons for maintaining the post beyond a time of severe crisis also pointed to American use of the intelligence; discussion of the Embassy’s future underlined ‘intelligence’ and ‘keeping even minimum political contact with the world’s most population nation, budding nuclear power, and with reference to Hong Kong’ as the two most significant reasons, both of which were singled out as having ‘value ... in dealing with Americans’.¹⁷⁶

In the immediate wake of the attack on the Embassy, James Murray, Head of the Far Eastern Department, called for a special conference to consider whether Britain should keep its Embassy open in Beijing. Intelligence was central to this debate, and Murray noted that this had important implications for ‘the representation of the friends’ and also for the ‘technical operation’ run out of the Embassy. These were typically circumlocutory references to the MI6 station and the GCHQ short-range interception operation. So important was this decision that he suggested calling Crawford Maclehose, former Political Adviser to the Governor of Hong Kong and currently Private Secretary to the Foreign Secretary back from a vacation with family in the Outer Hebrides to preside over the meeting. But, the

¹⁷⁵ TNA, FCO 21/34, Murray (London) to de la Mare (London), 17th November 1967.

¹⁷⁶ TNA, FCO 21/33, Hopson (Peking) to de la Mare (London), Telno. 714, 17th June 1967.

intelligence from Beijing was simply too valuable, and the meeting was never held.¹⁷⁷ Instead the Beijing experience translated into better fortified buildings, including a new Consulate that was opened in East Berlin a few years later, which had a distinctly praetorian demeanour.¹⁷⁸

Moreover, Britain's upper hand was also underlined by the fact that it also stood to gain from this arrangement. In comparison to other 'blind spots' where the Americans were the prime intelligence customers, Britain was also on the receiving end of intelligence exchange in Beijing. In a discussion of intelligence exchange in the Far Eastern Department at the Foreign Office, Bolland noted the 'very high value' that the Americans placed upon the intelligence from Beijing, stating that in return, 'they supply us with a great deal of other information from their own sources'. Additionally, 'special operations' were another reason given for maintaining the Beijing post beyond the August 1967 crisis, as these were 'producing useful material, again of value in our dealings with the Americans', albeit they did not envisage any in the near future.¹⁷⁹ It is for this reason that Murray labelled the British material from Beijing 'one of the most important elements in the contribution we make to the common pool of Anglo-American intelligence'.¹⁸⁰ Accordingly, by 1968, the British were repairing and restoring what was left of their battered Embassy in Beijing.

¹⁷⁷ TNA, FCO 21/34, Denson minute, 17 August 1967. Macle hose was about to be appointed Ambassador to Vietnam and then became Governor of Hong Kong in 1971.

¹⁷⁸ James Reeve, *Cocktails, Crisis and Cockroaches: A Diplomatic Trail* (London, 1999), pp.202-24.

¹⁷⁹ Ibid, Bolland (London) to de la Mare (London), 5th July 1967, 'The Future of the British Mission in Peking'. The use of the term 'special operations' here referred to major intelligence operations that would require clearance by the Foreign Secretary or the Prime Minister, rather than covert action type activity.

¹⁸⁰ TNA, FCO 21/35, Murray (London) to Heath (Librarian, E&O Department), 22nd August 1968, 'Visit by Sir D. Hopson to the United States'.

‘This Secret Town’: MI6 in Hanoi

‘John, I don’t see your telegrams until I’m in bed at night’.¹ Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs George Brown (1966-68) was talking to the British Consul-General in Hanoi, John Colvin, who was also a senior Secret Intelligence Service officer (MI6). Colvin and his successors produced a steady stream of observational reports from their post in central Hanoi, many of which made their way to British Prime Minister Harold Wilson, and his American counterpart, President Lyndon B. Johnson. During the height of the Vietnam War, political and social intelligence from this rather beleaguered outpost provided a unique window on the conflict, shedding light on a town under increasing pressure from an escalating American bombing campaign.

Why is Britain’s small MI6 watchtower on war-torn Hanoi of academic interest? First, it offers a direct challenge to two established international categories: ‘diplomat’ and ‘spy’. Whilst most intelligence officers waged a clandestine battle in the shadows of the Cold War, some operated in a blurred space between espionage and diplomacy. Although MI6 operated under the direction of the British Foreign Secretary, its officers were not diplomats *per se*.² Accordingly, the dual identity of these MI6 officers in Hanoi raises important questions about the nature of Cold War intelligence; the public role associated with diplomacy stood in stark contrast to the anonymity often afforded to classical espionage. Even prior to the First World War, much of Britain’s intelligence was gathered

¹ John Colvin, *Twice Around the World*, (London, 1991), p.107.

² The divide between intelligence officers and diplomats has various formal demarcations. Some intelligence officers are listed in the Diplomatic List and usually receive diplomatic cover (for example, some did become Ambassadors of Her Majesty’s Government). However, in this instance, the Consul-Generals were on MI6’s payroll, not the Foreign Office.

informally, by travellers, by officers and diplomats on leave, by civilians, even by explorers and archaeologists.³ But thereafter diplomats and spies were increasingly perceived as two separate professional categories, often marked by considerable antipathy.⁴ Indeed, the history of MI6 during the Cold War is often seen as one marked by growing professionalization and technocratic separation.⁵ With this growing divergence, Britain's Cold War diplomats displayed an ambiguous attitude to MI6, referring to them, not very sincerely, as 'the Friends'.⁶

However, newly released documents from the UK National Archives indicate that this division between diplomat and spy remained remarkably permeable. MI6 officers stationed in Hanoi were valued as experienced observers, even though the highly secure police state within which they operated in North Vietnam made real spying all but impossible. While the majority of historical scholarship expresses a consensus that these are two separate fields of activity, this essay seeks to demonstrate the existence of a joint diplomat-intelligence officer category. It examines the implications of the dual identity for our understanding of Cold War intelligence. There are other examples: just as Britain's BRIXMIS mission in East Germany represented an exercise in defence diplomacy, and none of its members were spies, yet it constituted one of the most effective intelligence gathering operations of the Cold War. As Michael Goodman has shown, the BBC Survey of World Broadcasts was funded in part from the UK intelligence budget and was considered one of Britain's best sources on the Soviet Bloc.⁷ More generally, perpetual British impecuniosities meant that, while the Americans could professionalise and specialise, by contrast MI6 partly met the challenge of a global Cold War with a ghost army of semi-retirees and part-timers moving between

³ John Fisher, 'Gentleman Spies in Asia', *Asian Affairs*, 41:2, (2010), pp. 202-4; Robert Johnson, *Spying for Empire: The Great Game in Central and South Asia. 1757-1947*, (London, 2006), pp. 13-36.

⁴ Michael Herman, 'Diplomacy and Intelligence', *Diplomacy and Statecraft*, 9:2 (1998), p. 2.

⁵ Keith Jeffery, *MI6: The History of the Secret Intelligence Service 1909-1949* (London, 2011) vii; Philip H.J. Davies, *MI6 and the Machinery of Spying: Structure and Process in Britain's Secret Service*, (London, 2004), pp.177-8.

⁶ Nigel West, *The Friends: Britain's Post-War Secret Intelligence Operations* (London, 1990).

⁷ Tony Geraghty, *Brixmis: The Untold Exploits of Britain's Most Daring Cold War Spy Mission* (London, 1996); Michael Goodman, 'British Intelligence and the British Broadcasting Corporation: A Snapshot of a Happy Marriage', In Robert Dover and Michael Goodman (eds.) *Spinning Intelligence* (London, 2009), pp. 117-32.

numerous occupations.⁸ Indeed, the divisions between spy, diplomat, journalist and academic seem notably flexible during the 1960s.⁹ It is suggested here that we now need to rethink the divide between espionage and other types of governmental activity that contributed to the intelligence picture underpinning British overseas policy.¹⁰

At a time when President Johnson sought to pursue a policy of military ‘gradualism’ in North Vietnam, the British reporting from the centre of Hanoi was a reliable, alternative means to American intelligence assessments of the impact of the air raids. Furthermore, during a period when intelligence was increasingly dominated by an American-led culture of ‘spying with science’, using computers and satellites, Britain’s Hanoi mission reminded senior policy-makers of the value of human reporting.¹¹ Indeed, the work of the MI6 officers who served in Hanoi prompts us to rethink the nature of the ‘special intelligence relationship’ between the UK and US. Hitherto this has been interpreted largely in post-imperial terms.¹² The British Commonwealth together with its remaining colonies, including Cyprus, Diego Garcia and Hong Kong, were clearly valuable to America during this period.¹³ In February 1968, American diplomats reviewed Britain’s remaining importance to America and emphasised what they called ‘the value of residual empire’ for the burgeoning American global military machine, especially in terms of airbases and locations from which to mount technical surveillance.¹⁴ Kim Philby, whose irreverent memoir of life in MI6 was published at this time,

⁸ Interview, Daphne Park, German Historical Institute, 17 April 2008.

⁹ See the case of Robert Zaehner in Iran during the 1950s, discussed in Mark J. Gasiorowski and Malcolm Byrne, *Mohammad Mosaddeq and the 1953 Coup in Iran* (Syracuse, 2003) pp. 129-35.

¹⁰ Reginald Hibbert distinguishes between secret intelligence and non-secret sources in Philip H.J. Davies, ‘The SIS Singapore Station and the Role of the Far East Controller: Secret Intelligence Structure and Process in Post-War Colonial Administration’, *Intelligence and National Security*, 14:4 (1999), p. 109. See also Michael Warner, ‘Wanted: A Definition of “Intelligence”’, *Studies in Intelligence* 46:3 (2002), pp. 15-22.

¹¹ Richard Helms, *A Look over my Shoulder: A Life in the Central Intelligence Agency*, (New York, 2003), pp. 264-268.

¹² For example, Calder Walton, *Empire of Secrets: British Intelligence, the Cold War, and the Twilight of Empire* (London, 2013), pp. 2-15; David Easter, ‘GCHQ and British External Policy in the 1960s’, *Intelligence and National Security*, 23:5 (2008), pp. 681-706.

¹³ Christopher M. Andrew, ‘The Growth of the Australian Intelligence Community and the Anglo-American Connection’, *Intelligence and National Security*, 4:2 (1989), p. 224; Philip H.J. Davies, *MI6 and the Machinery of Spying*, (London, 2004).

¹⁴ Harry S. Truman Presidential Library, ‘What Now for Britain?’, Box 8, Philip M. Kaiser Papers, , REU-11, Thomas L. Hughes, 7 February 1968.

recalled that the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) had told him: 'whenever we want to subvert any place...we find that the British own an island within easy reach.'¹⁵

However, the UK's Consulate-General in Hanoi is not about residual empire. Instead it illuminates an additional and neglected geographical aspect of the special relationship, which we might call the intelligence value of 'diplomatic divergence'. Throughout the Cold War, Britain's policy of *de facto* or *de jure* recognition for regimes that were in power – including communist states – stood in stark contrast to the American approach, which was more ideological. Typically, Britain formally recognised the Chinese Communist government and established an embassy in Beijing while the United States doggedly recognised Taiwan until 1975.¹⁶ Similar situations prevailed in Havana, Luanda, and more recently, in Teheran and Pyongyang. Britain enjoyed outposts in all these 'enemy' countries and their reporting was of notable interest to the United States. It is suggested here that Britain's diplomatic watchtowers in locations such as Hanoi, Peking and Havana constituted a valued element in the transatlantic intelligence relationship.¹⁷ The value of the post in Hanoi lay in its ability to provide insight into an area long-considered problematic for US intelligence.

Finally, Britain's Consulate General in Hanoi offers us a fascinating glimpse of the social history of embattled British outposts overseas. Historians have tended to view Britain's activities overseas through the prism of high policy, reflecting a lamentable bias in record preservation towards elite activity. Indeed diplomatic history as a whole has often been regarded as dry and even a little dull.¹⁸ By contrast, Britain's curious outstation in Hanoi at the height of the Vietnam War offers us a fascinating glimpse of the workaday tribulations of emissaries who were closely watched by the Vietnamese security state as they sought to take the pulse of everyday life within what they referred to as 'this secret town'.¹⁹

¹⁵ Kim Philby, *My Silent War* (London, 1968), p. 195.

¹⁶ R. Ovensdale, 'Britain, the United States, and the Recognition of Communist China', *The Historical Journal*, 26:1 (1983), pp. 139-158; N.B. Tucker, *Patterns in the Dust: Chinese-American Relations and the Recognition Controversy, 1949-1950* (New York, 1983).

¹⁷ For example James G. Hershberg, 'Their Man in Havana: Anglo-American Intelligence Exchanges and the Cuban Crises, 1961-62', *Intelligence and National Security*, 15:2 (2000), pp. 121-176.

¹⁸ Elizabeth Cobbs Hoffman, 'Diplomatic History and the meaning of Life: Toward a Global American History' *Diplomatic History*, 21:4 (1997), pp. 499-518.

¹⁹ Colvin, *Twice Around the World*, p. 69.

Britain's Precarious Outpost in Hanoi

Hanoi was not Britain's most attractive diplomatic station; in 1906 it was formally declared by the Foreign Office as an 'unhealthy post'.²⁰ Nevertheless, its significance rose steadily together with the strategic importance of South-East Asia, and as Japan expanded into the northern part of French Indochina in 1940, Britain's consulate offered her a ringside seat. Vietnam's growing significance was reflected in two important British interventions following the Second World War. First, British forces occupied southern Indochina in 1945 and assisted France's return to its colony. Thereafter, the bitterly contested French re-occupation ensured that Southeast Asia became one of the hotter regions of the Cold War.²¹ Second, following the French withdrawal in 1954, Britain's appointment as Co-Chairman of the Geneva Conference placed it in a prime position to help shape Vietnam's 'new political map'.²²

During the early 1960s, British activity in Vietnam remained significant. Britain's interests in the region were shaped by its successful termination of the Malayan Emergency and its creation of Malaysia. Its regional role was expanded by the creation of the South East Asian Treaty Organisation and its role as one of several powers guaranteeing the International Control Commission (ICC) for Vietnam created by the Geneva accords in 1954. In the early 1960s, Britain intervened directly, sending a British Advisory Mission to the South Vietnamese government that sought to impart the lessons of the Malayan Emergency. By now, Britain was also engaged in a large-scale military 'Confrontation' (albeit largely undeclared) against the increasingly pro-Communist government of Indonesia in Borneo.²³

Domestically, by 1967 Vietnam was high on Prime Minister Harold Wilson's political agenda. For the United States, who had by then committed half a million troops, British attitudes were

²⁰ See the extensive correspondence at T[he] N[ational Archives], P[ublic] R[ecord] O[ffice], FO 369/17/15, File 7109, folios 80-82, 1906.

²¹ Andrew Rotter, *The Path to Vietnam: Origins of the American Commitment to Southeast Asia*, (New York, 1989).

²² Simon Kear, 'The British Consulate-General in Hanoi, 1954-73', *Diplomacy and Statecraft*, 10:1 (1999), pp. 219-220; Kevin Ruane, 'Refusing to Pay the Price: British Foreign Policy and the Pursuit of Victory in Vietnam, 1952-54', *English Historical Review*, CX (435), (1999), pp. 72-75.

²³ Peter Busch, *All the Way with JFK? Britain, the US, and the Vietnam War* (New York, 2007), pp. 3-15; Matthew Jones, 'A Decision Delayed: Britain's Withdrawal from South East Asia Reconsidered, 1961-68', *English Historical Review*, 117:472 (2002), pp. 569-595.

a test of loyalty. By contrast, for much of the British Labour Party, and especially the left wing, opposition to Lyndon Johnson's Vietnam policy was a cause célèbre. Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs Michael Stewart (1968-70) observed that Vietnam was 'the most agonizing of all the problems I had to face.'²⁴ Wilson was especially anxious about the negative impact of American bombing of North Vietnam on his own domestic power base. In addition to opposition from his own party, disapproval of the war was widespread amongst the British public, as evidenced by the fact that on 17 March 1968 tens of thousands of protesters marched to the US Embassy in Grosvenor Square. Vietnam – to quote one historian – was a 'jungle too far' for Britain.²⁵ Wilson therefore had to strike a balance between distancing Britain from the bombing campaign, and support for its ally. Accordingly, the use of British intelligence assets to offer secret support to the United States's war effort in Vietnam was attractive, since it placated the White House but remained below the radar from the point of view of British public opinion.²⁶²⁷

Secret intelligence support took three forms. At a global level, Britain sought to replace American specialist intelligence assets in Europe, such as signals intelligence monitoring flights, in order to release American units for service in Vietnam. At a regional level, Britain provided volumes of signals intelligence from its large Government Communications Headquarters (GCHQ) monitoring station at Little Sai Wan in Hong Kong. The British colony of Hong Kong was also host to America's largest CIA station in the region which masqueraded as a 'consulate' and boasted some six-hundred

²⁴ Rhiannon Vickers, 'Harold Wilson, the British Labour Party, and the War in Vietnam', *Journal of Cold War Studies*, 10:2 (2008), pp. 41-43.

²⁵ Robert Fleming, 'A Jungle Too Far: Britain and the Vietnam War', <http://www.nam.ac.uk/whats-on/lunchtime-lectures/video-archive/jungle-too-far-britain-vietnam-war>.

²⁶ For more information, see Sylvia Ellis, *Britain America, and the Vietnam War*, (Westport, 2004); John Dumbrell and Sylvia Ellis, 'British Involvement in Vietnam Peace Initiatives, 1966-67: Marigolds, Sunflowers and 'Kosygin Week'', *Diplomatic History*, 27:1 (2003), pp. 113-149; Effie G.H. Pedaliu, 'Transatlantic Relations at a Time When 'More Flags' Meant 'No European Flags': the United States' War in Southeast Asia and its European Allies, 1964-68', *International History Review*, 35:3 (2013), pp. 556-575; Rodhri Jeffreys-Jones, *In Spies We Trust: The Story of Western Intelligence*, (Oxford, 2013).

²⁷ See Ruane, 'Refusing to Pay the Price', pp. 74-75 for a discussion of the Churchill administration's calculations in relation to Vietnam. Constraining America's actions, and thus preventing the eruption of a wider war constantly fed into Britain's calculations during the 1950s and 1960s in relation to Asia.

staff. Within Vietnam itself, Britain's most significant contribution was the intelligence activities of its Consulate-General in Hanoi.²⁸

Established in 1946 by Lieutenant Colonel Arthur Trevor-Wilson, the Consulate reflected a broader shift in MI6 towards longer-term political intelligence gathering.²⁹ Trevor-Wilson was one of the more colourful characters in MI6; having spent the inter-war years working for a French perfume house, he became the MI6 station chief in Algiers in 1942, and later was the first MI6 officer into liberated Paris in 1944.³⁰ In 1946, he was despatched to Hanoi, where he befriended North Vietnamese revolutionary (and later President) Ho Chi Minh, and accompanied him on overseas diplomatic missions. In the early 1950s, he was the steadfast drinking companion of Graham Greene, the British novelist and intelligence officer, in Vietnam until he was finally expelled by the French for being too friendly to the Vietminh.³¹ Although Britain had also stationed staff at Haiphong, North Vietnam's principal port city, this mission was short-lived and only operated during 1956-59.³² By contrast, Britain retained its unique outpost in Hanoi beyond the partition of Vietnam in 1954, and on through the height of the Vietnam War.

Britain's Consulate-General in Hanoi did not enjoy diplomatic status, since Britain did not officially recognise the Democratic Republic of North Vietnam (DRVN). The office was accredited to the municipality of Hanoi and so operated totally differently to the British Embassy in Saigon.³³ Although the regular duties of the Consulate-General during the 1950s have attracted the attention of diplomatic historians, the sequential presence of six MI6 officers at the height of the Vietnam War has been overlooked. Although he provides an excellent overview of the Consulate's diplomatic activities

²⁸ Richard J. Aldrich, 'The Value of Residual Empire: Anglo-American Intelligence Cooperation in Asia after 1945', in Richard Aldrich and Michael Hopkins, (eds.), *Intelligence, Defence and Diplomacy: British Policy in the Post-War World*, (London, 1994), pp. 226-258.

²⁹ Richard J. Aldrich, *Intelligence and the War Against Japan: Britain, America and the Politics of Secret Service*, (Cambridge, 2000), p. 348.

³⁰ David G. Marr, *Vietnam: State War and Revolution* (Berkeley, 2013), pp.227-8; Manuela A. Williams, *Mussolini's Propaganda Abroad: Subversion in the Mediterranean and the Middle East* (London, 2006), p. 170; T.O. Smith, *Britain and the Origins of the Vietnam War: UK Policy in Indo-China, 1943-50* (London, 2007), pp. 78-9.

³¹ Fredrik Logevall, *Embers of War: The Fall of an Empire and the Making of America's Vietnam* (New York, 2012), pp. 293-5.

³² TNA, FO 371/186408, 'Status of Consulate-General Hanoi', Murray to de la Mare, 22 September 1966.

³³ Kear, 'The British Consulate-General in Hanoi', p. 220.

in a substantial profile of the post, Kear fails to take note of the fact that six Consul-Generals were MI6 officers.³⁴ The same is to be said of Priest and Hughes in their thorough discussion of Anglo-American strategic intelligence assessments of South Vietnam in 1963. Although they recognise that the British had ‘access to a multitude of sources independent of, and sometimes superior to’ the Americans, including the British presence in Hong Kong and Beijing, they make no mention of the intelligence presence in Hanoi, other than a brief allusion to how information from JIC reports was available in other Foreign Office documents.³⁵

In fact, between 1964 and 1973, all the Consul-Generals were experienced mid-career MI6 officers boasting considerable geographic expertise, ranging from Russia, to Africa, to the Far East. The first was Myles Ponsonby, who was stationed in Hanoi between 1964-65, before he took over as head of the MI6 station in Rome in 1969.³⁶ His successor, John Colvin, witnessed first-hand the gradual escalation of American bombing from tactical strikes to heavy raids, known as ‘Operation Rolling Thunder’, during his posting in Hanoi. Colvin went on to serve as the MI6 regional controller in the Far East and then MI6 liaison officer in Washington.³⁷ In 1967, Colvin was replaced by Brian Stewart who served in Hanoi for two eventful years before becoming Secretary to the Joint Intelligence Committee, and was tipped by many to become a future Chief of MI6.³⁸ Stewart was succeeded by Gordon Philo, who having served in Turkey, rose to be principal staff officer to the head of the service.³⁹ In 1969, Daphne Park, Baroness of Monmouth, a high profile Africa hand who had

³⁴ Ibid, pp. 217-220. Kear offers an excellent overview of the activities of the Consulate-General to 1965 including the Davies Mission.

³⁵ Andrew Priest and R. Gerald Hughes, ‘American and British Intelligence on South Vietnam, 1963’, in R. Gerald Hughes, Peter Jackson, and Len. V. Scott, (eds.), *Exploring Intelligence Archives: Enquiries into the Secret State*, (Abingdon, 2008), pp. 173-212.

³⁶ ‘Ponsonby, Myles Walter’, Special Forces Roll of Honour, 27 July 2006. Available at <http://www.specialforcesroh.com/showthread.php?30670-Ponsonby-Myles-Walter>. Last accessed 23 January 2014.

³⁷ Obituary: ‘John Colvin: Diplomat and Spy who served in Hanoi during the Vietnam War’, *Independent*, 16 October 2003. Available at <http://www.independent.co.uk/news/obituaries/john-colvin-37281.html>. Last accessed 23 January 2014. See also John Colvin, ‘Hanoi in My Time’, *Washington Quarterly*, Spring 1981, pp. 143-46.

³⁸ Stewart is named as an MI6 officer in Amy Davidson, ‘I Wouldn’t Begin to Know’, *New Yorker*, 11 November 2010. Available at <http://www.newyorker.com/online/blogs/closeread/2010/11/i-wouldnt-begin-to-know.html>. Last accessed 23 January 2014.

³⁹ ‘Gordon Philo: SIS Officer and Writer’, *The Times*, 18 March 2009. Available at <http://www.thetimes.co.uk/tto/opinion/obituaries/article2084774.ece>. Last accessed 23 January 2014.

previously served in the Congo was stationed in Hanoi.⁴⁰ Finally, John Liudzius, a veteran of Eastern Bloc ‘rollback’ operations against the Russians arrived in Hanoi in 1971.⁴¹

Collecting Intelligence on the Ground

The Consulate-General in Hanoi was known in the Foreign Office as ‘the worst post in the world’.⁴² Plagued by crushing heat and humidity, Hanoi’s worn and broken buildings lay in disrepair, debris from bomb damage littered the streets, rendering the city a ‘decay beyond remedy, the degradation of one of the most noble cities in Asia’.⁴³ As Park shrewdly observed, ‘...what the American bombs had not already laid waste appeared...to have been destroyed by years of neglect’.⁴⁴ Located in the commotion of downtown Hanoi, this ‘general air of dilapidation’ extended to the British residence and office,⁴⁵ where at official events, strategically-placed Union Jack flags hid cracks in the wall, offsetting its ‘heavy and inelegant’ interior.⁴⁶ As Daphne Park famously noted in her valedictory despatch from Hanoi, the Residence was formerly a ‘house of ill-fame’, having a bidet in every bathroom.⁴⁷ For Colvin, the city’s spirit was captured in the simultaneous ‘filth’ and ‘vigour’ evident to the casual observer walking around town.⁴⁸ Collecting intelligence here at ground level presented some unique challenges.

The Consulate-General occupied a peculiar place within Hanoi’s political landscape. The shadow of non-recognition hung over the post, affecting the manner in which its staff were treated. Their status in Hanoi fluctuated between that of private foreign residents and fully accredited

⁴⁰ Gordon Corera, *The Art of Betrayal*, (New York, 2012), pp. 103-106.

⁴¹ Curtis Peebles, *Twilight Warriors: Covert Air Operations Against the USSR*, (Annapolis, 2005), p. 59.

⁴² Kear, ‘The British Consulate-General in Hanoi’, p. 221.

⁴³ Colvin, *Twice Around the World*, 33; Colvin, ‘Hanoi in My Time’, pp. 143-44, 150.

⁴⁴ Paddy Hayes, *Queens of Spies: Daphne Park, Britain’s Cold War Spy Master*, (London, 2015), p. 221.

⁴⁵ Brian Stewart, *Scrapbook of Roving Highlander: 80 Years Round Asia and Back*, (Newark, 2002), p. 232.

⁴⁶ N[atational] S[ecurity] F[iles]: Vietnam Country File, L[ynndon] B[aines] J[ohnson] Library, Box 85, ‘Celebration of the Birthday of Her Majesty the Queen’, Stewart (Hanoi) to Brown (London), 10 June 1968.

⁴⁷ Hayes, *Queen of Spies*, p. 221.

⁴⁸ Colvin, *Twice Around the World*, p. 69.

diplomats.⁴⁹ On occasion, they were denied opportunities to meet foreign visitors and journalists, and in one case, were even labelled ‘English immigrants’ on a visit to a museum, and yet, sometimes found themselves seated on the same table as Politburo members at a diplomatic reception.⁵⁰ The refusal of the North Vietnamese authorities to permit the British staff to tour areas of Hanoi heavily damaged by air raids (a privilege granted to full diplomatic missions) led to confrontations; Vice-Consul Livesey reported being followed three times in the vicinity of the consular office, whilst Consul-General Stewart was arrested and detained in Hanoi the following year en route to a church.⁵¹ Accused of spying in the area that had suffered the greatest damage from US air raids, London debated whether the incident had jeopardised his position in Hanoi, and consequently his utility for reporting.⁵²

The ‘curious anomaly’ of the Consulate’s status had other indirect consequences.⁵³ In the absence of diplomatic relations, Stewart noted that the easiest way for the DRVN to register its displeasure at the British would be via ‘administrative harassment’ of the consular staff.⁵⁴ The speed with which the DRVN carried out administrative requests was often used as a gauge of political relations between the two countries. For example, when granted a permit for a new car, Stewart deduced that the Consulate was ‘in a better political standing than before’, whilst Park considered the speed at which her luggage was returned, and DRVN restraint at opening various boxes in Customs as indicators of the Consulate’s improved political standing.⁵⁵ Colvin observed that sometimes the reasons for administrative harassment could be clearly traced back to London’s policies! In several instances, ministerial statements made in London that were favourable to the US resulted in delayed

⁴⁹ TNA, FCO 15/555, Stewart (Hanoi) to Murray (London), 11 October 1967.

⁵⁰ Ibid; FCO 15/555, ‘Visit to Military Museum’, Stewart (Hanoi) to Murray (London), 1 February 1968; Colvin, *Twice Around the World*, p. 5.

⁵¹ TNA, FCO 15/578, Colvin (Hanoi) to Murray (London), 8 August 1967.

⁵² TNA, FCO 15/556, ‘Position of H.M. Consul-General, Hanoi’, Murray to Wilkinson, 29 December 1967.

⁵³ TNA, FCO 15/555, Stewart (Hanoi) to Murray (London), 11 October 1967.

⁵⁴ TNA, FCO 15/578, Tel. 48, Stewart (Hanoi) to Murray (London), 27 May 1968.

⁵⁵ TNA, FCO 15/555, ‘Relations with the DRV’, Stewart (Hanoi) to Murray (London), 6 June 1968; FCO 15/1355, ‘No Profile in Hanoi’, Park (Hanoi) to Murray (London), 26 June 1970.

exit visas and even arbitrary power blackouts for the Consulate.⁵⁶ London did not take such actions lightly and saw that the DRVN was constantly trying to increase the restrictions on its staff.⁵⁷

On one occasion, when running short of petrol and refused more by the appropriate ministry, Park unabashedly sought permission to import a bicycle. After various exchanges between Park and the ministry, including one response that it was ‘unsafe for an honourable lady to be regularly cycling to the airport at night’, Park wrote a third time, asking for permission to import a tandem and promising to take her driver with her - but without any response.⁵⁸ After some months, she returned to the issue and suggested a trishaw with a member of the North Vietnamese counterintelligence bureau as peddler - which was accepted! For one of her colleagues however, eventually her sense of mischief went too far: ‘she turned up at the Soviet national day with a Union Jack on the handlebars. The trishaw was withdrawn.’⁵⁹ Just as Park greatly enjoyed such opportunities to tease the authorities, Stewart observed that the Russian, Asian, and African ‘hands’ each brought different understandings of a security state to bear on their life in Hanoi.⁶⁰

Stewart described a ‘steady wing-clipping exercise’ by the DRVN.⁶¹ Fuel was ‘permanently unobtainable’ for the Consulate-General, and the staff were denied privileges often afforded to most diplomatic missions, such as permits to import furnishings and power generators, and general repairs to the building.⁶² The consular staff often had to resort to elaborate methods in order to obtain basic supplies; when, for example, the petrol ration for the Consulate was stopped, Stewart relied on borrowing petrol from friendly missions and bringing it home in old gin bottles.⁶³ The differing personalities and experiences of the Consuls-General often determined how they handled their prison-like existence in Hanoi. Whilst Colvin often sought to travel abroad to escape the mental pressure of

⁵⁶ Colvin, *Twice Around the World*, pp. 45-48.

⁵⁷ TNA, FCO 15/1725, ‘Consulate-General at Hanoi’, Squire to Wilford, 24 May 1972.

⁵⁸ Bill Collier, *Diplomatic Wanderings: From Saigon to the South Seas* (London, 2003) 29.

⁵⁹ Sir Gerald Warner, ‘The Secret Intelligence Service: Memorial Address’, 29 May 2010, in Pauline Adams and Liz Cooke (eds.), *Daphne Park 1921-2010, Memorial Tributes*, 2010, p. 25; see also the extensive correspondence at TNA, FCO 15/1355, ‘Administrative Problems of Consulate-General in Hanoi’, 1970.

⁶⁰ Brian Stewart, in discussion with the author, 5-6 November 2013.

⁶¹ TNA, FCO 15/555, Tel. 49, Stewart (Hanoi) to Foreign Office (London), 21 December 1967.

⁶² Colvin, *Twice Around the World*, p. 27, 47; TNA, FCO 15/555, ‘The Position of the Consulate-General in Hanoi’, Stewart (Hanoi) to Murray (London), 12 December 1967.

⁶³ Stewart, *Scrapbook of Roving Highlander*, p. 236.

bugging and ‘the constant need for speech security’ in Hanoi, his successor, Daphne Park - the legendary career MI6 officer – was more cavalier and forced Hanoi’s restrictions to suit her. Park also told London that she found ‘a certain satisfaction in not noticing harassment when it happens’.⁶⁴ If the DRVN’s actions were intended to register displeasure at the British, Stewart lamented that there was ‘not much wing left to clip’.⁶⁵

North Vietnam was paranoid about spying. Accordingly, as the war escalated in the mid-1960s, the Consulate staff found themselves subject to numerous counterintelligence measures that constrained their operating environment. In particular, the DRVN sought to control physical movement by repeatedly denying the Consuls-General a bicycle permit, a driving licence, or sufficient petrol rations for their car to get to the airport - all under the pretence of ‘protection’ or ‘security’.⁶⁶ These measures were effective in narrowing the space in which the British were able to gather intelligence. By January 1968, Colvin’s replacement, Brian Stewart, conceded that the lack of the use of a car, bicycle, and the restriction of the area in which he was permitted to take walks ‘reduced significantly’ his reporting capacity, forcing him to rely on a network of friends to gather intelligence on the outskirts of Hanoi where much of the bombing was concentrated.⁶⁷

The consular staff worried about speech security. According to Colvin, the staff operated under the assumption of ‘total technical surveillance’ by the local authorities, also accepting that their house staff served as low-level spies on behalf of the local police, and that the consular residence was most likely ‘wired from top to bottom’.⁶⁸ In the 1960s, Western diplomats serving in Communist countries had reported a bugging epidemic in their embassies as a result of the miniaturisation allowed by transistors.⁶⁹ In Hanoi, the authorities barely attempted to hide technical surveillance. Colvin recalls two Vietnamese technicians paying an unexpected visit to the consular residence to ‘repair’ an

⁶⁴ TNA, FC 15/1355, ‘No Profile in Hanoi’, Park (Hanoi) to Murray (London), 26 June 1970.

⁶⁵ TNA, FCO 15/578, Tel. 49, Stewart (Hanoi) to Foreign Office (London), 21 December 1967.

⁶⁶ TNA, FCO 15/1355, ‘Tandem Tactic’, *The Daily Express*, 28 August 1970; Colvin, *Twice Around the World*, p. 69; TNA, FCO 15/1355, ‘No Profile in Hanoi’, Park (Hanoi) to Murray (London), 26 June 1970.

⁶⁷ TNA, FCO 15/555, ‘Restrictions on Movement in Hanoi’, Stewart (Hanoi) to Murray (London), 4 January 1968.

⁶⁸ Colvin, *Twice Around the World*, p. 36.

⁶⁹ Richard J. Aldrich, *GCHQ: The Uncensored Story of Britain’s Most Secret Intelligence Agency* (London, 2011), pp. 183-200.

issue with the unbroken telephone set - they extracted 'two presumably worn out devices' which Colvin was asked to hold as they were replaced! Instances such as this were characteristic of life in the British residence; as such, secret matters were confined to either discussion in the open air, or communicated indoors by writing.⁷⁰ Some were more comfortable with this than others: Park, who noted that she was reported on daily, accepted this as a quirk of living in a Communist country, adding that, 'you don't hold it against the person or feel rancorous about it'.⁷¹

Cypher Wars

The 1960s were a turbulent time for British diplomatic premises in Asia. In early September 1963, substantial protests took place outside the British and Malaysian embassies in Jakarta, whilst in Sumatra, mobs wrecked both the British and Malaysian Consulates. On 17th September 1963, violent riots erupted again in Jakarta, and the British Embassy there was sacked and burned while the security forces stood by. In March 1964, government-inspired riots in Phnom Penh damaged the British Embassy, the British Information Offices, and completely destroyed the British Council offices.

In August 1967, echoing the actions of Beijing in the previous chapter, the North Vietnamese government withdrew cypher privileges from the British Consulate-General in Hanoi, preventing the transmission of secret outbound telegram traffic.⁷² It is not clear how closely events in Beijing and Hanoi were connected.⁷³ Somewhat implausibly, the DRVN claimed that the sole criterion for outward cypher rights and use of the consular bag was recognition of the DRVN and the associated issue of proper diplomatic status.⁷⁴ The move should have come as little surprise; in March 1965, Ponsonby reported delays in receiving telegrams from London, (adding that he had no means of

⁷⁰ Colvin, *Twice Around the World*, p. 61-62.

⁷¹ Adams and Cooke, (*Memorial Tributes*, p. 36.

⁷² TNA, FCO 15/578, 'Communications with Hanoi', Fyjis-Walker to de la Mare, 17 August 1967; FCO 15/578, DSYT 1/196/1, 'Department Circular', Communications Department, 21 February 1968.

⁷³ On the impact of the Cultural Revolution on DRVN politics see S. Quinn-Judge, 'The Ideological Debate in the DRV and the Significance of the Anti-Party Affair, 1967-68', *Cold War History*, 5:4 (2005), pp. 479-500.

⁷⁴ TNA, FCO 15/578, Stewart (Hanoi) to Murray (London), 29 August 1967.

knowing whether his telegrams were reaching London), born out of suspicion that Hanoi was stopping the transmission of cypher telegrams.⁷⁵ Whilst that was explained simply as the result of administrative delays, Ponsonby attached a document to London that clearly indicated Hanoi had been tampering with his telegrams.⁷⁶ The withdrawal of cypher rights effectively meant that whilst the Consulate-General could continue to collect intelligence, it lacked a secret, secure and fast means of getting its information back to London.

Numerous options were considered as short-term means of restoring secret communications with London, including offering cypher telegram facilities in both directions to North Vietnamese officials in London, or introducing a third staff member to act as an undeclared 'personal courier service'.⁷⁷ The former was particularly risky, as the North Vietnamese base in London was supposedly 'the main base for securing supplies of foreign currency to support the guerrilla war in the South'.⁷⁸ The problem persisted for several years and in 1971, when the cypher privileges had still not been restored, the high-risk possibility of using a Chinese flight to Hong Kong was even considered to get British material out of Hanoi.⁷⁹ Although able to send uncyphered telegrams to London, Brian Stewart, the incumbent Consul-General, knew that these communications were vulnerable to the 'diligent Hanoi monitors of our telegraphic traffic'.⁸⁰ Stewart needed to send his reports back to London without the formal apparatus of intelligence reporting which denoted sources and methods. He therefore devised a discreet code whereby various innocent phrases would signal different levels of source reliability for sensitive material, including his detailed commentary of the effects of US bombing, or DRVN internal politics.⁸¹

⁷⁵ TNA, FCO 371/180510, Ponsonby (Hanoi) to FCO (London), 3rd March 1965.

⁷⁶ Ibid, Ponsonby (Hanoi) to FCO (London), 1st March 1965. Ponsonby attached a telegram in which the heading was on a separate piece of paper to the main body, described as 'stuck on as an afterthought, and probably nothing to do with the original message'. Pointing to the carbon reversal of the ply-paper used, he indicated that the original endorsement of the time and date of receipt had been removed.

⁷⁷ TNA, FCO 15/578, Tel. 350, Foreign Office to Hanoi, 20 September 1967; TNA, FCO 15/578, Tel. 1325, 13 November 1967.

⁷⁸ Hayes, *Queen of Spies*, p. 215.

⁷⁹ TNA, FCO 15/1495, 'The Post at Hanoi', Margetson, 20 September 1971.

⁸⁰ TNA, FCO 15/578, 'Telegrams to and from Hanoi', Stewart (Hanoi) to Murray (London), 7 December 1967.

⁸¹ TNA, FCO 15/578, 'En Clair Conventions', Stewart (Hanoi) to Smedley (Vientiane), 5 March 1968.

Hanoi's new restrictions were a blow. At various points during 1966 and 1967, Colvin's cypher facilities had not only provided excellent reporting on Hanoi but also offered a secure conduit for any visiting Western figures who were putting out informal peace feelers to the North Vietnamese. The British repeatedly offered the Americans the use of this 'secure channel' for any initiatives, recognising that the practicalities of secret exchanges between the two combatants were difficult. In February 1967, US Secretary of State Dean Rusk responded by asking the British to use Colvin to 'convey to the North Vietnamese that we place the highest priority on finding a mutually agreeable, completely secure arrangement for exchanging communications with them, and we will attempt to meet any suggestions they have to offer to achieve this end'. Therefore, the truncation of Colvin's cypher rights in mid-1967 sent both London and Washington a sombre message.⁸²

The restrictions also impeded British efforts to pass timely intelligence to the Americans. Therefore Stewart made secret use of the Canadian component of the International Control Commission (ICC) to pass his intelligence back to London. Run by the Canadians, Indians, and Poles, the ICC enjoyed Commission stations in Hanoi, Saigon, and Vientiane. Established in 1954, the ICC's mission was to oversee the implementation of the Geneva Accords, which had resulted in the partition of Indochina and ceasefire agreements in Vietnam, Laos and Cambodia. The ICC staff used two dilapidated Dakota D-47 transport aircraft to commute between them until one crashed in the jungle, reducing the fleet to one. The aircraft flew from Saigon to Vientiane (via Phnom Penh), and was the only link for Western or non-communist missions in Hanoi with the outside world. British staff were allowed to use this unnerving form of transport to move between the consulate in Hanoi and the British Embassy in Vientiane, as well as to collect diplomatic mail, though flight nights were sporadic – they depended on the guarantee of safe passage by Pathet Lao guerrillas, and impending US air raids threatened its safety. Some of the Consul-Generals would visit the Saigon Embassy as often as once a month, brief colleagues, use its cypher facilities and pick up welcome supplies. Indeed, that 'was the main purpose of the ICC from the British point of view'.⁸³

⁸² TNA, FCO 82/320, Summary of events of 5 January 1967 and 4 February 1967, Top Secret NO-DIS.

⁸³ Remarks of Sir John Margetson, 'Negotiating While Fighting: Peace Initiatives, British Policy and the Vietnam War', *Foreign and Commonwealth Office*, Seminar Transcript, 9 May 2012, p. 40.

All three delegations to the ICC (Canadian, Polish, and Indian) enjoyed diplomatic bag and cypher privileges. However, using the Canadian diplomatic bags was risky, and an uncertain, unsatisfactory substitute for a regular bag run. Although diplomatic bags were usually regarded as inviolable, local behaviour was unpredictable, and arbitrary changes in DRVN customs regulations often posed obstacles.⁸⁴ For example, an incident in which the connecting door between two ICC compounds was locked forced the British Vice Consul-General to carry the diplomatic bag in plain sight through the street - where it could be seen by the ever-watchful security police.⁸⁵

If the diplomatic bag option was problematic, British use of the Canadian ICC wireless facility was even more precarious. Although the signal link offered a means of transmitting encyphered messages to the British Embassy in Saigon, it was operated by Indian signallers who were notoriously incompetent and slow, often 'garbling' messages during transmission.⁸⁶ Accordingly, sensitive material was transported by the most secure means possible at the time - on handwritten manuscripts safely tucked away into the Consul-General's pocket. However, the volume was negligible and had to await travel by the Consul-General to a location such as Saigon. Accordingly, from August 1967, Hanoi had effectively denied the British the possibility of secret real time reporting.⁸⁷

All these alternative forms of messaging carried significant risks, including arrest. In both Hanoi and Peking, a fear of reprisal hung over the consular staff, who inhabited what one official termed an 'Alice in Wonderland state of communications'.⁸⁸ Extreme diligence was required in wording in order to avoid cross-referencing different forms of communication, and the Canadian conduit required the complete concealment of all British identification marks.⁸⁹ North Vietnam's

Available at http://issuu.com/fcohistorians/docs/final_transcript_with_revisions_pdf. Last accessed 18 February 2014.

⁸⁴ TNA, FCO 15/578, Tel. 48, Stewart (Hanoi) to Foreign Office (London), 27 May 1968; FCO 15/578, Stewart (Hanoi) to Murray (London), 26 October 1967.

⁸⁵ TNA, FCO 15/560, Colvin (Hanoi) to Murray (London), 2 May 1967.

⁸⁶ TNA, FCO 15/578, 'Telegraphic Communications', Stewart (Hanoi) to Murray (London), 24 October 1967.

⁸⁷ Stewart, in discussion with the author, 2013.

⁸⁸ TNA, FCO 15/578, Tel. 850, Wilkinson (Saigon) to Foreign Office (London), 7 November 1967.

⁸⁹ TNA, FCO 15/578, DSYT 1/196/1, Tel. 48, 'Department Circular', Communications Department, Stewart (Hanoi) to Foreign Office (London), 21 February 1968.

reasons for withdrawing cypher rights were also a constant source of debate. Interpretations fluctuated; some saw the withdrawal as an attempt to ‘flush’ British diplomats out of North Vietnam entirely, whilst others viewed the measure merely as a logical response to the Consulate-General’s ‘non-status’.⁹⁰ Richard Fyjis-Walker, Deputy Head of the South-East Asia Department, saw a ‘deeper significance’. For him, the withdrawal signalled an impending military escalation by the North, requiring a tightening of ‘loopholes through which any sort of intelligence might be thought to be reaching their enemies, the Americans’.⁹¹

Although Fyjis-Walker’s reasoning was well grounded - the Tet Offensive was launched only a few months later in early 1968 – there was in fact a more mundane explanation. Colvin (or his deputy, Geoffrey Livesey) had broken a fundamental rule of clandestine communications by referring to two encyphered telegrams in an en clair (uncyphered) message. The two encyphered telegrams were intelligence reports on the extent of post-bombing damage after US Air Force raids, which made reference to reports by a French diplomat that the bomb damage to the Cau dyke was ‘the worst damaged dyke that he had so far seen’.⁹² The error - referring to secret communications in an open message - would have heightened lingering suspicions by the North Vietnamese; the previous year, they had inferred similar accounts of bombing damage in US press reports and Congressional testimony, indicating the probable source of US intelligence to be allied diplomats.⁹³

Yet it was never clear exactly how much the DRVN knew about British activities. Interpretations varied between the Consul-Generals. John Liudzius, an MI6 officer⁹⁴ who served as Consul-General during 1970-71, was convinced that the DRVN were aware of British use of the ICC Canadian bag. The Consulate’s North Vietnamese secretary/interpreter changed his schedule without prompting when ICC flight schedules changed, and together with the ‘additional interest’ displayed by security guards around the Consulate on bag days, prompting his conviction that they were aware of

⁹⁰ Ibid. TNA, FCO 15/578, Murray (London to Stewart (Hanoi), 31 October 1967.

⁹¹ TNA, FCO 15/555, ‘H.M. Consulate-General in Hanoi’, Fyjis-Walker to Murray, 23 November 1967.

⁹² TNA, FCO 15/578 FCO (London) to Consulate-General (Hanoi), 17 August 1967.

⁹³ TNA, FCO 15/578, Livesey (Hanoi) to FCO (London), 1 August 1967.

⁹⁴ His previous MI6 career is discussed in Tom Bower, *The Red Web: MI6 and the KGB Master Coup*, (London, 1989), p. 58.

bag use.⁹⁵ Stewart was certain that the DRVN knew of British circumvention of restrictions, pointing out that his house staff were undoubtedly reporting back to the DRVN accounts of his well-stocked cellar and grocery store, clearly the result of more than an occasional air trip. However disliked the British reporting was, had the North Vietnamese restored the cypher rights, they would not have known what the British were reporting.⁹⁶ The speculation was endless. By 1971, Liudzius calculated that even if the DRVN was aware of British secret communications they might now have come to the conclusion - with negotiations looming - that it might be favourable to have conditions in Hanoi reported upon objectively.⁹⁷

Despite British deftness at evading the DRVN cypher restrictions, the future of the Consulate-General was constantly in the balance. The Canadians had already been accused – quite rightly - of conducting their own espionage activities by the North Vietnamese government, and subsequently, a Canadian member of the ICC was expelled from Hanoi.⁹⁸⁹⁹ With this in mind, the British staff were wary of what John Colvin described as ‘espionage psychosis’ in North Vietnam - a heightened sensitivity (and hostility) to foreign activities, following unfavourable Western reporting of bombing sites.¹⁰⁰ From London’s perspective, unless the consular staff could transmit their intelligence back home, their main purpose was lost and they would be reduced to ‘waving a metaphorical Union Jack, incommunicado’.¹⁰¹

Perceptions were paramount; it was clear that the North Vietnamese authorities regarded the British as spies. Contemplating the North Vietnamese regime’s knowledge of Canadian bag use, for example, Liudzius remarked upon various indications that the DRVN - amongst others - ‘attach a spy aura to our post’.¹⁰² Manifested through their counterintelligence measures designed to disrupt and

⁹⁵ TNA, FCO 15/1495, ‘Status of H.M. Consulate-General in Hanoi’, Liudzius (Hanoi) to Murray (London), 30 September 1971.

⁹⁶ Stewart, in discussion with the author, 12-13th November, 2014.

⁹⁷ TNA, FCO 15/1495, ‘Status of H.M. Consulate-General in Hanoi’, Liudzius (Hanoi) to Murray (London), 30 September 1971.

⁹⁸ TNA, FCO 15/578, ‘Communications with Hanoi’, Fyjis-Walker to de la Mare, 17 August 1967.

⁹⁹ The Canadian component of the ICC was reporting intelligence to the Americans, much like the British. See Margaret K. Gnoinska, *Poland and Vietnam, 1963: New Evidence on Secret Communist Diplomacy and the ‘Maneli Affair’*, (Washington: Cold War International History Project, 2005).

¹⁰⁰ TNA, FCO 15/578, Colvin (Hanoi) to Murray (London), 8 August 1967.

¹⁰¹ TNA, FCO 15/578, Stewart (Hanoi) to Murray (London), 22 November 1967.

¹⁰² TNA, FCO 15/1495, Liudzius (Hanoi) to FCO (London), 1971.

inhibit the activities of the British officers, the behaviour of the DRVN made it clear that they considered the observational activities of the British Consul-Generals as intelligence gathering. Therefore, in the eyes of the North Vietnamese, 'intelligence' was not necessarily 'secrets how we understand secrets',¹⁰³ but, nonetheless, a form of spying on their regime. The intelligence value of the post flowed in the opposite direction, too; detailing growing instances of theft from the foreign missions in Hanoi, Stewart interpreted them as 'possible evidence of increased DRV intelligence interest' in the missions. Noting that they coincided with a period of preparations for peace talks, the theft of briefcases and tape recordings from the Canadian villa, for example, was likely engineered by the DRVN in order to 'improve their access to intelligence on non-communist assessments and, of course, on US intentions'.

Washington failed to cover the tracks of its British collaborators. Despite the hazards faced by British personnel, the Americans were cavalier in their use of the resulting intelligence, using it publicly to justify continued bombing. In 1972, in open session, American officials told a Congressional Committee that there was now 'a good deal more evidence on the nature of the strain produced by the bombing' of North Vietnam. They added that the 'US intelligence indications' that underpinned this were based on the views of the Hanoi diplomatic community, 'notably the Canadians and the British'.¹⁰⁴ For both London and Washington, intelligence from Hanoi on the impact of the bombing upon North Vietnam was important, albeit for different reasons.

Blurring Boundaries

While the diplomatic and political utility of the Hanoi Consulate-General post has been recognised in other literature, its intelligence value seems to have gone unnoticed.¹⁰⁵ Although the US once had a

¹⁰³ Stewart, in discussion with the author, 2014.

¹⁰⁴ Congressional Record, *United States Congress*, (Washington DC: US Government Print Office, 1972), 118:13, p. 16772.

¹⁰⁵ Kear, 'The British Consulate-General in Hanoi', 225. Kear uses the Davies Mission to illustrate the Consulate's political function, especially as an alternative to traditional diplomatic channels. See also

Consulate in Hanoi in the early 1950s, this had been closed in retaliation for a decision by the North Vietnamese authorities to ban the consulate from using its radio to transmit outbound messages, thus significantly hampering its communication capacity.¹⁰⁶ Therefore, the British Consulate was able to provide reporting from a location that had proved impenetrable to US intelligence agents –from ‘inside the enemy citadel’, as Colvin aptly put it.¹⁰⁷ Historically, the CIA had a poor track record when it came to North Vietnam; a 1955 plot (jointly with MI6) to instigate a row in the Hanoi politburo that they hoped would lead to the assassination of Ho Chi Minh failed, whilst efforts by the CIA to develop relationships in Saigon collapsed owing to a lack of Vietnamese-speaking officers.¹⁰⁸ Furthermore, the CIA had repeatedly failed in its efforts to launch covert missions in the North,¹⁰⁹ and its lack of human agent coverage meant it was virtually blind in Hanoi. Every covert penetration mission launched from the South had either been wound up or ‘played back’ as a deception operation by the DRVN’s formidable counterintelligence service.¹¹⁰

Despairing of progress, the White House transferred responsibility for these missions from the CIA to the Pentagon in the hope of better results, but to no avail. Richard Schultz concludes that the CIA and the Pentagon inserted some five hundred agents into the North to set up spy networks, but ‘Hanoi caught every one and doubled several back for years.’¹¹¹ American intelligence was therefore restricted to a diet of satellite imagery and signals intelligence, supplemented by the only non-technical source available to the Americans – ‘exile intelligence’.¹¹² In the latter case, American reports usually depended on reports from the debriefing of refugees, which brought only limited

John W. Young, ‘The Wilson Government and the Davies Peace Mission to North Vietnam, July 1965’, *Review of International Studies*, 24:4 (1998), p. 547, on the failed Davies Mission to Hanoi.

¹⁰⁶ Thomas James Corcoran, in Hayes, *Queen of Spies*, p. 214.

¹⁰⁷ Colvin, *Twice Around the World*, p. 3.

¹⁰⁸ Tom Bower, *The Perfect English Spy: Sir Dick White and the Secret War, 1935-90*, (London, 1995), p. 227.

¹⁰⁹ Matthew Aid, *The Secret Sentry: the Untold History of the National Security Agency*, (New York, 2009), pp. 80-82; See also ‘The Way We Do Things: Black Entry Operations into North Vietnam’ in Thomas L. Ahern Jr., *Vietnam Histories*, (Washington DC, 2008).

¹¹⁰ Kenneth Conboy and Dale Andradé, *Spies and Commandos: How America Lost the Secret War in North Vietnam* (Lawrence, 2000); Sedgwick D. Tourison, *Secret Army, Secret War: Washington's Tragic Spy Operation in North Vietnam* (Annapolis, 1995).

¹¹¹ Richard H. Shultz Jr, *The Secret War Against Hanoi: Kennedy's and Johnson's use of Spies, Saboteurs, and Covert Warriors in North Vietnam* (London, 1999), p. 340.

¹¹² Stewart, in discussion with the author, 2014.

value.¹¹³ Refugees had little interaction with the North Vietnamese government, possessed out of date knowledge, and were likely to exaggerate the ills of the society that they had escaped.¹¹⁴ Often the information was acquired in locations such as Saigon or Vientiane and was long out of date.¹¹⁵ Often the information came from elsewhere altogether and was acquired in locations such as Saigon or Vientiane.¹¹⁶ By contrast, the British intelligence officers at the Consulate offered experienced reporting, from trained observers.

At a time when MI6 operations in Asia were being questioned and some responsibilities were being handed over to its burgeoning Australian sister service, Hanoi was an example of successful intelligence collection.¹¹⁷ Conventional accounts of Cold War intelligence have tended to separate the roles of diplomats and intelligence officers. Typically, Corera's study of MI6 during the Cold War argues that diplomats were 'keen to keep relations ticking over' while intelligence officers were 'there to steal secrets and generally up to no good', adding that this could result in friction between the two sets of actors.¹¹⁸ Yet, the value of the British intelligence owed much to the dual identity of the MI6 officers – the positioning of seasoned intelligence officers in a consular role. Moreover, it is now clear that a number of people advanced their careers by working alternately in both services.¹¹⁹

¹¹³ LBJ Library, NSF: Vietnam Country File, Box 85, 'Comments on the Effects of US Air Strikes, Missile Launchings, Transportation Difficulties and Food and Drug Shortages in North Vietnam', Intelligence Information Cable, *Central Intelligence Agency*, 6 June 1967; Note, Rostow (White House) to Johnson (White House), 13 May 1967; 'General Low Morale of the North Vietnamese Population and the Factors contributing to it', *Central Intelligence Agency*, 10 May 1967.

¹¹⁴ LBJ Library, NSF: Vietnam Country File, Box 85, 'Impressions of Conditions in North Vietnam', Intelligence Information Cable, *Central Intelligence Agency*, 30 December 1967; 'Reaction to American Air Strikes of Coastal Area Inhabitants of North Vietnamese Provinces between 17th and 20th Parallels', Intelligence Information Cable, *Central Intelligence Agency*, 7 March 1967.

¹¹⁵ LBJ Library, NSF: Vietnam Country File, Box 85, 'Reaction to American Air Strikes of Coastal Area Inhabitants of North Vietnamese Provinces between 17th and 20th Parallels', Intelligence Information Cable, *Central Intelligence Agency*, 7 March 1967; 'Description of Conditions in Hanoi', Intelligence Information Cable, *Central Intelligence Agency*, 28 November 1967.

¹¹⁶ LBJ Library, NSF: Vietnam Country File, Box 85, 'Reaction to American Air Strikes of Coastal Area Inhabitants of North Vietnamese Provinces between 17th and 20th Parallels', Intelligence Information Cable, *Central Intelligence Agency*, 7 March 1967; 'Description of Conditions in Hanoi', Intelligence Information Cable, *Central Intelligence Agency*, 28 November 1967.

¹¹⁷ Ibid, pp. 132-133; B. Toohey and W. Pinwell, *Oyster: The Story of the Australian Secret Intelligence Service* (Sydney, 1989).

¹¹⁸ Corera, *The Art of Betrayal*, p. 103.

¹¹⁹ Examples include Nigel Clive, a career MI6 officer who later ran the Information Research Department, or John Rennie, a diplomat who served as Chief of MI6 between 1968 and 1973.

Although the penumbral nature of the Consulate's status limited the radius of its operations, its staff enjoyed real immersion within the adversary's society. Some historians have emphasised their lack of access to the North Vietnamese governing elite, but as we shall see this was not always the case.¹²⁰ Moreover, the intelligence backgrounds of the six Consul-Generals facilitated the careful cultivation of relationships with officials inside the diplomatic community in Hanoi, as well as a small number of non-diplomatic contacts. Park, for example, regarded intelligence work in Hanoi as a combination of covert activity and developing high-level personal relationships, which in turn provided intelligence.¹²¹ In her case she developed a close friendship with the Soviet Ambassador in Hanoi, Ilya Shcherbakov. Beyond simply cultivating contacts, their intelligence background lent itself to sifting through and recording the finer details of the 'closely cultivated, sorted-through relationships', in contrast with diplomats, who tended not to separate such information (i.e. sources and opinion or comment) in their reports.¹²²

Britain's diplomat-intelligence officers also had the access to open sources in Hanoi that the United States lacked. In short, they behaved like amateur anthropologists. With regard to non-clandestine material, British officers collected a 'mass of stuff' that the diplomats tended to overlook, relying instead upon official comments or reports published by the host government. Stewart, for example, would often visit his local bookshop to peruse magazines and newspapers – most of which was passed onto London or Washington – and listened to local radio broadcasts, gauging local opinion.¹²³ As trained MI6 officers they were also aware of the complex issues of intelligence 'validation'. Given the scarcity of information in a highly secure state, they knew that intelligence could be 'tainted by the cross-breeding of speculation, false confirmation and the like'.¹²⁴ Stewart preferred personal and physical observations, emphasising that, for him, the only really reliable source seemed to be 'the evidence of our senses'.¹²⁵ Given the lack of equivalent expert cadre

¹²⁰ Kear, 'The British Consulate-General in Hanoi', pp. 222-223.

¹²¹ Ibid; Corera, *The Art of Betrayal*, p. 133.

¹²² Stewart, in discussion with the author, 2014.

¹²³ Ibid.

¹²⁴ TNA, FCO 15/555, Stewart (Hanoi) to Murray (London), 11 October 1967.

¹²⁵ Ibid.

to interpret the Vietnamese press papers, Stewart's Vietnamese linguistic skills were also of use in understanding the value of the local press as a source information (or misinformation).¹²⁶

The blurring of boundaries also extended into the military realm. Stewart observed that his position was more akin to that of a military attaché; there to observe, rather than run agents, his mission effectively consisting of work with 'eyes, ears, and camera'.¹²⁷ Former JIC Chairman Michael Herman has argued that though experienced in the use of intelligence, and 'the most able people around', diplomats are not trained to handle military matters or the covert evidence underlying them. Conceiving of the intelligence collection system as resisting distinct boundaries, he points to military attaches as 'sitting at various points on a continuum' between covert and covert source collection.¹²⁸ The dual identity of the Consul-Generals therefore enabled them to bridge a divide; Colvin, for example, was asked to give London map squares taken from a North Vietnamese map of Hanoi in order to locate the villages of houses that he claims were damaged by American air raids, and to identify targets Colvin claimed could be spotted from the road.¹²⁹ Similarly, in his reports to London, Liudzius often detailed his sightings of 'about 20 small planes, presumably fighters/trainers, and one 4-engined plane away from the small ones' on a military base near Tam Dao.¹³⁰

However, Hanoi was also an example of the limitations of intelligence gathering within a security state. This operated on a number of levels: rather than simply being the result of working within the confines of a security state, the constraints on intelligence gathering were partly the result of non-recognition of the DRVN. Park observed that 'the real hardship lies in the fact that, surrounded by Vietnamese, we can know none of them'. Non-recognition created a 'special vacuum' around the British staff, in which they could live amongst the Vietnamese, but not interact with them – what Park termed 'co-existence without contact'.¹³¹ Liudzius expressed a similar frustration at understanding the

¹²⁶ Stewart, in discussion with the author, 2014. For more information, see 'Vietnam: A Can of Worms' in Brian Stewart and Samantha Newbury, *Why Spy?: The Art of Intelligence*, (London, 2015).

¹²⁷ Stewart, in discussion with the author, 2014.

¹²⁸ Michael Herman, 'Intelligence and Policy: A Comment', *Intelligence and National Security*, 6:1 (1991), pp. 231-235.

¹²⁹ TNA, FCO 371/186354, Fyjis-Walker (London) to Colvin (Hanoi), 14th December 1966.

¹³⁰ TNA, FCO 15/1494, Liudzius (Hanoi) to Burgess (London), 20th August 1971.

¹³¹ TNA, FCO 15/1355, Park (Hanoi) to Douglas-Home (London), 'Her Majesty's Representative in Limbo: A Valedictory', 25th October 1970.

attitudes of the ordinary Vietnamese around him. For him, the ‘observer’ status in Hanoi meant that he could not get ‘much below the surface in our knowledge of them and of their thoughts’, reducing his own views to ‘little more than impressions’ of the town.¹³²

The impact on their access to human sources was considerable. In a significant despatch to London on an impending North Vietnamese propaganda campaign against US bombing, Colvin conceded that, since he was unable to leave Hanoi, his sources were confined to ‘two non-Communist Frenchmen, and one left-wing, but truthful, old British female’, discounting Eastern Bloc journalists amongst others. This did not go unnoticed by London. In a letter to the Foreign Office, Gordon remarked that ‘there are few other posts where the staff are prevented so completely by the authorities from having an effective contact with the local population’, adding that the number of North Vietnamese with whom Liudzius conversed ‘probably does not exceed a dozen’, limiting his valedictory despatch to a ‘series of impressions’ based on his observations from Hanoi.¹³³

Hanoi was therefore a significant example of conducting ‘intelligence without espionage’. Drawing some parallels with Herman’s conception of intelligence, Reginald Hibbert, (himself a former senior Foreign Office official whose career embraced intelligence) argued that in order for intelligence to be considered a useful term, it should be used in a broader sense beyond simply ‘secrecy’. In this respect, information collected by diplomatic and consular missions formed a key component of the ‘layer cake of intelligence’ in which secret intelligence comprised of less than ten per cent of assorted intelligence on a country. Within this more holistic understanding of intelligence, the British material contributed towards ‘as comprehensive and accurate a picture as possible of the attitudes, policies, political and economic imperatives and likely course of action’ on the North Vietnamese regime.¹³⁴

Echoing Foreign Office discussions in the early 1950s, in April 1966, Gordon Etherington-Smith, then the UK Ambassador to Saigon, questioned the utility of continuing the two-man post.¹³⁵

¹³² TNA, FCO 15/1474, ‘Some Reflections on a Year in Hanoi’, Liudzius (Hanoi) to Tomlinson (London), October 1971.

¹³³ TNA, FCO 15/1474, Gordon (London) to Tomlinson (London), 25th November 1971.

¹³⁴ Reginald Hibbert, ‘Intelligence and Policy’, *Intelligence and National Security*, 5:1 (1990), pp. 111-112.

¹³⁵ TNA, FCO 371/186408, Etherington-Smith (Saigon) to FCO (London), 1 April 1966.

Then too, SIS had fought for its survival; then chief of SIS, Sir Stewart Menzies, wholly disagreed, having a 'fondness for operating in out of way places'.¹³⁶ Into the 1960s, the value of the Hanoi post grew alongside the US's accelerating campaign of air bombardment. If, as has been argued in this chapter, the definition of 'intelligence' lay in the eye of the beholder, then from the American perspective, the Hanoi material filled a discernible gap. What the British reporting offered was essentially an anthropological assessment, consisting of detailed impressions of life from the centre of enemy society.¹³⁷ Moreover, this unique British intelligence resonated at the highest levels of the American government. The British, French, and Canadians were the only Western representatives able to report from Hanoi, and as we shall see, the British observations made their way to the desks of the US Secretary of State, the Director of the CIA, the National Security Advisor and ultimately, the President. The intelligence fell into three main categories: high level political intelligence; observations from Hanoi of psychological value; and observations of military value.

The Despatches

What was the main value of British reporting from Hanoi? The attitude of senior leaders to the possibility of talks between the US and DRVN was undoubtedly the matter of the greatest interest for London and Washington. Lacking direct channels with Hanoi, the US had been enquiring on a weekly basis as to what the attitudes of the North Vietnamese might be if US bombing ceased; Rusk had remarked to one of Prime Minister Wilson's advisors that 'every week they received no reply', describing the North Vietnamese reaction to the thirty-seven day pause in the bombing campaign as 'totally intransigent'.¹³⁸ Although direct access to Hanoi's political leadership was episodic, at best, the British Consuls-General were able to confer often with ambassadors, particularly from the Soviet bloc, to gauge political developments in North Vietnam.¹³⁹ Colvin noted that other diplomats in Hanoi

¹³⁶ Hayes, *Queen of Spies*, p. 214.

¹³⁷ Stewart, in discussion with the author, 2014.

¹³⁸ TNA, PREM 13/1274, Downing Street (London) memo (no date), 1966.

¹³⁹ Kear, 'The British Consulate-General in Hanoi', p. 231.

often disclosed information to him because of his perceived association with the US, in the hope that Washington would hear their messages. Brazenly denying any direct contact with the Americans, he was happy to maintain the facade, observing that he had ‘something, however factitious’, to offer them.¹⁴⁰ As the only Consul-General able to speak Vietnamese, Stewart devoted much time to assessing North Vietnam’s Foreign Minister, Nguyen Duy Trinh’s use of syntax in political statements that might indicate the seriousness with which Hanoi was considering negotiations in exchange for the cessation of bombing raids, and under what conditions they would come to the negotiating table.¹⁴¹

Although the Consulate’s non-diplomatic status prevented its staff from being included on the regular diplomatic social list, the Consuls-General were sometimes invited to DRVN national occasions.¹⁴² Despite not being allowed to mix freely with the Vietnamese people, at these receptions Park was able to converse with the Vietnamese Politburo, who had also been invited.¹⁴³ Typically, at National Day celebrations, the interactions between officials and foreign representatives were often indicative of higher politics at play: Sino-Soviet tension often manifested itself at such events.¹⁴⁴ At an important Chinese reception, a walkout by Soviet and Eastern bloc representatives in response to a Chinese speech was compounded by a veiled threat from the Chinese to the DRVN against ‘any attempt at negotiation or any other action other than continued obduracy’ in the same speech.¹⁴⁵ The

¹⁴⁰ Colvin, *Twice Around the World*, p. 57.

¹⁴¹ LBJ Library, NSF: Vietnam Country File, Box 34, Tel. 63, Stewart (Hanoi, via Macle hose, Saigon) to FCO (London); Tel. 2, Stewart (Hanoi) to FCO (London), 5 January 1968; TNA, FCO 15/1474, Tel. 31, Liudzius (Hanoi, via Lloyd, Vientiane) to FCO (London), 26 November 1971. This was significant – according to Kosygin, the possibility of negotiations essentially came down to Trinh’s statement of whether an unconditional halt in bombing ‘would’ or ‘could’ allow for talks. For more see Ellis and Dumbrell, ‘British Involvement in Peace Initiatives’, pp. 132-146; Stewart in discussion with the author, 2014.

¹⁴² Caroline Alexander, ‘Profiles: Vital Powers’, *New Yorker*, 30 January 1989, p. 57–71. (Profile of Daphne Park).

¹⁴³ Stewart, *Scrapbook of a Roving Highlander*, p. 237.

¹⁴⁴ LBJ Library, NSF: Vietnam Country File, Box 86, No. 10, Colvin (Hanoi) to Brown (London), 30 September 1967.

¹⁴⁵ TNA, FCO 15/1076, ‘Hanoi W/E 27 December’, Park (Hanoi) to FCO (London), 29 December 1969; TNA, FCO 15/1000, Tel. 51, ‘Observations from Hanoi’, Philo (Hanoi) to FCO (London), September 1969.

Soviet Ambassador in Hanoi frequently used the British to register his unofficial views of the intentions of the North Vietnamese government and to criticise Chinese policy.¹⁴⁶

For the Americans, British intelligence from Hanoi was chiefly about the impact of the bombing campaign. Lacking its own observers on the ground in North Vietnam, the US government struggled in its efforts to analyse the effects of the air raids, and its attempts at assessment were described as ‘merely perfunctory’ as late as 1972. Known as the ‘Hanoi watchers’, the nearest US intelligence observers were based in Saigon, and relied on weak sources – interrogations of prisoners of war, radio broadcasts, and newspapers filtered out of Vietnam - some obtained by the British Consul-General - to gauge the impact on North Vietnamese society. Without input from reliable human sources, evidence was ‘thin and slow’ and often outdated.¹⁴⁷ An appraisal of the bombing of North Vietnam in 1965, for example, cited regional press reports, aerial photography (which the reported conceded was not always available), and most unreliably, North Vietnamese regime propaganda as its sources. American assertions that propaganda statements nevertheless ‘probably reflect current Hanoi estimates of the situation’, highlights the painful lack of first hand reports.¹⁴⁸

The observations of the British Consuls-General therefore provided valuable insights into the effects of the air war. For example, Stewart’s comments on the impact of US bombing upon Haiphong in October 1967, using two of his human sources, were typical of the material forwarded to both the CIA and the Defence Intelligence Agency (DIA). The CIA and DIA worked together to produce a regular assessment of “Rolling Thunder”, fusing aerial photography with allied diplomatic reporting.¹⁴⁹ Describing the destruction of the city as having ‘the air of a European city which had suffered general bombardment during the last war’, and the ‘great fortitude’ of the population in face

¹⁴⁶ Kear, ‘The British Consulate-General in Hanoi’, p. 232.

¹⁴⁷ National Archives at College Park, MD, Henry S. Bradsher, ‘The Hanoi Watchers’, *The Washington Star*, 25 May 1972, Records of the Central Intelligence Agency, CREST Database.

¹⁴⁸ Ibid, ‘An Appraisal of the Bombing of North Vietnam’, 1965, Records of the Central Intelligence Agency, CREST Database.

¹⁴⁹ CIA/DIA, ‘An Appraisal of the Bombing of North Vietnam’ (through 12 September 1966), 0240817016, Larry Berman Collection. Texas Tech Archives.

of such destruction, Stewart's despatch made its way up to Walt Rostow, US National Security Advisor.¹⁵⁰ Similar material was often read by President Johnson himself.

President Johnson often requested more detailed intelligence on the impact of the air raids. Operation 'Rolling Thunder' was an expression of Johnson's policy of 'gradualism', but also the subject of constant argument in the National Security Council (NSC). Aware that in late 1966, air raids near Hanoi had effectively terminated North Vietnamese interest in making contact through diplomatic channels (known as the peace initiative 'Marigold'), Johnson agonised over devising a policy that would pressure the North Vietnamese, but without risking targets that might jeopardise negotiations.¹⁵¹ In addition to avoiding civilian casualties, he also strove to avoid inflaming political tensions with the Soviets and Chinese to prevent escalation into a wider war. The resultant 'gradualism' campaign comprised targets confined to areas away from major cities, interspersed with self-imposed 'sanctuaries' (areas of no-fire) and bombing pauses.¹⁵² A commentary by Rostow for the President on 'the extracts you wanted on life in North Vietnam',¹⁵³ underlined the importance of the British intelligence reports from central Hanoi as a means of assessing the broader impact of his gradualism campaign.

Typically, in May 1967, Rostow asked Director of Central Intelligence, Richard Helms, for a detailed report from Colvin on the effects of the bombing of a power plant in Hanoi to give to the President.¹⁵⁴ The following day, Johnson was given a first-hand account of the raid by 'a somewhat aggrieved' Consul-General on the disruption of power and water supplies in Hanoi, stating that 'every other town in North Vietnam is in even worse shape and bombing is unlikely to reduce infiltration, let

¹⁵⁰ LBJ Library, NSF: Vietnam Country File, Box 85, 'Report from H.M. Consul-General, Hanoi: Visits to Haiphong in Mid-October', Stewart (Hanoi) to FCO (London).

¹⁵¹ Wayne Thompson, *To Hanoi and Back: the United States Air Force and North Vietnam, 1966-73*, (Washington DC, 2000), p. 43.

¹⁵² *Ibid*, p. 25. According to Thompson, no other President had involved himself to such an extent in the selection of targets and bombing tactics, especially when compared to the military's recommendations.

¹⁵³ LBJ Library, NSF: Vietnam Country File, Box 85, Rostow (White House) to Johnson (White House), 31 August 1967.

¹⁵⁴ LBJ Library, NSF: Vietnam Country File, Box 85, Brown (White House) to Johnson (White House), 21 May 1967.

alone bring this peasant nation to negotiate'.¹⁵⁵ This raid took place on 19 May 1967. Colvin was standing on the balcony of the Consulate with his Vice-Consul, Geoffrey Livesey, as air raid alarms sounded. Seven or eight F-105 Thunderchiefs shot across their vision at roof-top height, seeming 'so close we could almost touch them or call out to the pilots'. Although the British did not usually inspect the results of air raids - this could easily open them up to claims of acting as 'spotters' for the US Air Force - in this instance, the target was so near that they could not resist a look. It seemed heavily damaged beyond repair, but, surprisingly, the following day the power returned to that area of Hanoi. This supported Colvin's general view that the raids were not yet at an intensity to overcome North Vietnam's resourcefulness or determination.¹⁵⁶ As Rostow observed to Johnson, Colvin's reporting showed 'what the bombing of Haiphong and Hanoi is really like - - with all due respect to intelligence analysts 10,000 miles away'.¹⁵⁷

What intrigued Johnson and Rostow were the little things.¹⁵⁸ Colvin's observations on savings programmes or the 'Campaign against Decadent Youth' constituted compelling indicators of the performance of the Vietnamese economy and societal cohesion during wartime.¹⁵⁹ American overhead photography was plentiful, but it could not capture intangible but important subjects such as morale, war weariness, and the degree of acquiescence to political leadership amongst the Vietnamese population. British reports also allowed for limited validation of American intelligence. For example, a report by Stewart detailing the 'social evils' present within Hanoi, such as 'prostitution, teddy boys, and black marketeers' reinforced a report by the US Ambassador in Saigon that drew to Rostow's attention rising rates of prostitution and teenage crime as one index of the effectiveness of the

¹⁵⁵ LBJ Library, NSF: Vietnam Country File, Box 85, Rostow (White House) to Johnson (White House), 22 May 1967; LBJ Library, NSF: Vietnam Country File, Box 85, Colvin (Hanoi) to FCO (London), Tel. 338, Colvin (Hanoi) to FCO (London), 22 May 1967.

¹⁵⁶ John Clark Pratt (ed.) *Vietnam Voices: Perspectives on the War Years, 1941-1975* (Georgia, 2008), pp. 266-9.

¹⁵⁷ LBJ Library, NSF: Vietnam Country File, Box 85, Rostow (White House) to Johnson (White House), 7 October 1967.

¹⁵⁸ TNA, FCO 15/524, 'Hanoi Observations', Stewart (Hanoi) to FCO (London), 27 September 1968; LBJ Library, NSF: Vietnam Country File, Box 85, 'Hanoi Observations', Stewart (Hanoi) to FCO (London), 23 August 1968.

¹⁵⁹ LBJ Library, NSF: Vietnam Country File, Box 85, 'British Reports from Hanoi - Effect of Bombings', American Embassy (Saigon) to Department of State (Washington), 9 June 1967.

bombing campaign.¹⁶⁰ Social observations were supplemented by copies of Vietnamese newspapers and publications scooped up in Hanoi and sent out via the diplomatic bag. The main customers for this material were 'a multiplicity of more or less esoteric American agencies'.¹⁶¹

British intelligence reports were also saturated with information of military value. The ability of the British officers to circulate around Hanoi - what Colvin termed the 'continual investigation à pied' of Hanoi - elucidated images of a town gearing itself towards protracted warfare.¹⁶² Through the extensive mobilisation of women for the war effort or census checks on the civilian population (in relation to draft-dodging/desertion), the various forays of the Consul-Generals around Hanoi provided glimpses into the fabric of a society under the duress of war.¹⁶³ During a casual stroll through Thong Nhat Park in Hanoi, Stewart discovered that 'shabby peasant huts of wood and leaves' were in fact concealing anti-aircraft batteries, wireless masts, and signal cables.¹⁶⁴ A similar walk in the Zoological Gardens inadvertently placed Stewart and his deputy in a prime position to watch an air raid on a key bridge in Hanoi. Observing that the 'SAMs (surface to air missiles) seemed to be a good deal less effective than the A.A.' (anti-aircraft batteries), Stewart witnessed the shooting down of five US planes, and two parachutes descending.¹⁶⁵ Stewart also reported having seen special scoreboards around Hanoi advertising the results of what they called the 'battle for Hanoi'.¹⁶⁶ Harston, one of Park's successors, remarked that despite being limited to a two kilometre radius of Hanoi, key routes still yielded insightful clues; one of his five routes passed rubbish bins outside the military hospital,

¹⁶⁰ TNA, FCO 15/524, 'Hanoi Observations', Stewart (Hanoi) to FCO (London), 27 September 1968; LBJ Library, NSF: Vietnam Country File, Box 85, Note to Rostow (White House), 11 July 1968; LBJ Library, NSF: Vietnam Country File, Box 85, Bunker (Saigon) to Rusk (Washington), July 1968.

¹⁶¹ TNA, FCO 15/578, 'Vietnamese Publication Procurement', Stewart (Hanoi) to Murray (London), 27 November 1967.

¹⁶² Colvin, *Twice Around the World*, p. 38, 65.

¹⁶³ LBJ Library, NSF: Vietnam Country File, Box 257, Ponsonby (Hanoi) to FCO (London), 13 May 1965; LBJ Library, NSF: Vietnam Country File, Box 257, 'Hanoi Observations', Stewart (Hanoi) to FCO (London), 23 August 1968; LBJ Library, NSF: Vietnam Country File, Box 85, 'Hanoi Observations', Stewart (Hanoi) to FCO (London) 4 July 1968.

¹⁶⁴ LBJ Library, NSF: Vietnam Country File, 'Hanoi Observations', Stewart (Hanoi) to FCO (London), (no date).

¹⁶⁵ LBJ Library, NSF: Vietnam Country File, Box 85, Stewart (Hanoi) to Brown (London), 27 October 1967.

¹⁶⁶ TNA, FCO 15/524, 'Final Observations after Twelve Months in Hanoi', Stewart (Hanoi) to Stewart (London), 27 September 1968.

giving him a good estimate of the number of soldiers being recruited 'just by counting the syringes used for inoculations'.¹⁶⁷

Additionally, scouring the local newspapers for information, which in itself was an integral daily part of the Consul-General's routine, yielded figures such as the daily count of the number of American planes shot down - though, the Vietnamese tendency to inflate these figures somewhat skewed their value - and a discussion of the movement of Chinese troops closer to the DRVN border.¹⁶⁸ Moreover another of interest to the US was information on US prisoners of war. The main North Vietnamese holding centre for prisoners of war was Hoa Lo prison – just a short stroll away from the Consulate, whilst another location, Son Tay prisoner, was around twenty miles from the centre of Hanoi, at which the US had supposedly attempted to conduct a rescue attempt not long after Park's return to London in November 1970.¹⁶⁹ In conjunction with British signals intelligence provided from Hong Kong, the on-the-ground reports contributed to a clearer picture of Hanoi's military activities, and as Young has suggested, may have even helped the US to plan their military operations.¹⁷⁰

Anglo-American Divergence

Sharing intelligence did not mean shared outlooks or shared policies. Colvin consistently expressed his apprehension at the US achieving any sort of success in its bombing campaign.¹⁷¹ According to him, the air raids had not 'decisively affected the economy or the strategic capacity' of the DRVN, nor had they increased resistance amongst ordinary Vietnamese.¹⁷² Stewart echoed this

¹⁶⁷ Hayes, *Queen of Spies*, p. 224.

¹⁶⁸ Sophie Quinn-Judge, 'The Ideological Debate in the DRV and the Significance of the Anti-Party Affair, 1967-68', *Cold War History*, 5:4 (2005), 486; LBJ Library, NSF: Vietnam Country File, Box 34, Tel. 63, Stewart (Hanoi, via Maclehorse) to FCO (London), 27 June 1968.

¹⁶⁹ Hayes, *Queen of Spies*, pp. 232-233.

¹⁷⁰ Young, 'The Wilson Government and the Davies Peace Mission to North Vietnam', p. 73.

¹⁷¹ Colvin, *Twice Around the World*, p. 42, 84.

¹⁷² Ibid, pp. 52-53; TNA, FCO 15/555, 'H.M. Consul-General, Hanoi, Murray to de la Mare, 2 June 1967.

theme, and did not perceive any fundamental change before or after the remarkable Tet Offensive in February 1968. Tet was one of the largest-scale military campaigns to take place during the conflict, initiated by the North Vietnamese Army. Although the offensive inflicted heavy casualties on the North Vietnamese, it was a huge psychological blow to the South Vietnamese and American forces, and induced a halt in the US bombing campaign. Stewart was well placed to gauge the possibility of talks in the aftermath of the Tet Offensive, and believed that the DRVN's supposed willingness to enter into talks was little more than a 'semantic exercise'. Rostow agreed with Stewart's 'grim, but possibly realistic assessment' that the DRVN leadership had disguised its true intentions of being prepared to settle for a protracted war, for which... 'they are fully prepared at whatever continuing sacrifice'.¹⁷³

Colvin, Stewart, and their successors, perhaps under-rated their importance in counterbalancing the American quantitative approach to estimating the war in and around the North Vietnamese capital. Light-heartedly labelling himself the 'forward observation officer' for the US Air Force in Hanoi, Stewart was at the same time wary that the critical tone of his reports placed him at odds with the US defence and intelligence communities reading his material.¹⁷⁴ Wary that his 'one-man band' differed in its assessments to those of the US civil, military and intelligence apparatus, Stewart conceded that his reports were unlikely to receive the same weight or consideration if they differed significantly from those of staff in Saigon, Singapore and Washington. From both his own impressions, and sources who had passed through other towns in North Vietnam, Colvin's perception of a resilient and resourceful population (especially in the aftermath of air raids) ran counter to US beliefs that the air raids would eventually defeat a technologically inferior adversary.¹⁷⁵ Similarly, in Stewart's mind, the US approach to counting enemy casualties, the number of raids carried out, or the amount of installations damaged was fruitless in comparison to what he was able to provide - an 'analysis of the mind of the people' in Hanoi.¹⁷⁶

¹⁷³ LBJ Library, NSF: Vietnam Country File, Box 95, Rostow (White House) to Johnson (White House), 14 February 1968; LBJ Library, NSF: Vietnam Country File, Box 95, Tel. 90, Stewart (Hanoi) to FCO (London), 13 February 1968.

¹⁷⁴ Stewart, *Scrapbook of a Roving Highlander*, pp. 233-235.

¹⁷⁵ Colvin, *Twice Around the World*, p. 106.

¹⁷⁶ Stewart, *Scrapbook of a Roving Highlander*, pp. 233-235.

Collectively, the British intelligence flowing from Hanoi supported what Colvin termed the ‘implacability thesis’.¹⁷⁷ Given Vietnam’s history of resistance to foreign rule, for Colvin, the hardened attitude of the DRVN leadership and the grit of the broader population pointed to a country that had ‘made war a way of life’.¹⁷⁸¹⁷⁹ Similarly, in his final despatch from Hanoi in 1971, Liudzius expressed doubt that the DRVN would opt for a negotiated settlement, insisting that its people were ‘resigned to the prospect of a protracted struggle’ rather than surrender.¹⁸⁰ Stewart even went as far as to argue that the US air campaign had in fact fuelled the DRVN propaganda machine through the sighting of US planes over Hanoi. Up until 1964, he observed, the enemy was ‘an unseen and unknown figure in South Vietnam whose deeds and very existence were perhaps unreal’. But the manifestation of US planes over Hanoi had inadvertently provided a symbol against which the DRVN were able to rally the population.¹⁸¹

The critical tone of the British reports was emblematic of a broader tension at play in the special relationship. Dumbrell, Ellis, and Jeffreys-Jones have argued that a high degree of ‘transatlantic antagonism’ was palpable over Vietnam.¹⁸² Britain’s ongoing economic decline - accelerated by its decolonisation process, military overstretch, and a struggling economy - had effectively relegated Britain to the role of junior partner in the ‘special relationship’. According to Dumbrell and Ellis, both countries were well aware that the power differential between them continued to grow, underlined in Rusk’s statement that ‘the concept of Atlantic cooperation could

¹⁷⁷ TNA, FCO 15/648, ‘Escalation as Seen from Hanoi’, Colvin (Hanoi) to Brown (London), 7 April 1967.

¹⁷⁸ For a discussion of Vietnamese history and resistance to foreign invasion, see Colvin, *Twice Around the World*, pp. 7-15, and Stewart, *Scrapbook of a Roving Highlander*, pp. 228-236.

¹⁷⁹ TNA, FCO 15/648, ‘Escalation as Seen from Hanoi’, Colvin (Hanoi) to Brown (London), 7 April 1967.

¹⁸⁰ TNA, FCO 15/1474, ‘Some Reflections on a Year in Hanoi’, Liudzius (Hanoi) to Tomlinson (London), October 1971.

¹⁸¹ TNA, FCO 15/524, ‘Final Observations after Twelve Months in Hanoi’, Stewart (Hanoi) to Stewart (London), 27 September 1968.

¹⁸² Dumbrell and Ellis, ‘British Involvement in Vietnam Peace Initiatives’, p. 115, p. 146; Rodhri Jeffreys-Jones, ‘The End of an Exclusive Special Intelligence Relationship: British-American Intelligence Cooperation Before, During and After the 1960s’, *Intelligence and National Security*, 27:5 (2012), pp. 707-721.

replace the special relationship'.¹⁸³ As Dumbrell has argued, as the twentieth century progressed, a continued close alliance was predicated on an increasingly narrow base of defence and intelligence co-operation.¹⁸⁴

Studies of Anglo-American relations in foreign policy during the 1960s have tended to focus on the nuclear deterrent, NATO, and Europe.¹⁸⁵ Yet, Britain's military non-involvement in Vietnam was a significant point of contention with the Americans, at a time when Anglo-American relations were already characterised as being in a 'negative and distrustful state'.¹⁸⁶ Both Wilson and Johnson faced intense domestic pressure respectively; the former was under fire from strong internal opposition, which criticised what it regarded as Britain's contradictory policy in Vietnam, whilst the latter grappled with a host of objections from both the policymaking elite in Washington and the general public.¹⁸⁷ The result was intense disagreement between two leaders as to the best course of action in Vietnam. Moreover, Johnson believed that Britain was not fulfilling its obligations as a member of the South East Asia Treaty Organisation (SEATO), and no longer attached 'any real importance' to the UK's co-chairmanship of the ICC.¹⁸⁸

By contrast, from the British perspective, Johnson's political isolation over Vietnam was self-inflicted. Wilson saw an inherent contradiction in the US's military campaign, maintaining that the air raids – and the US's choice of military targets in particular – ran counter to Johnson's ultimate intended objective: a negotiated settlement.¹⁸⁹ These tensions surfaced most clearly in the US bombing of Hanoi and Haiphong in 1966, in which, in a statement to the House of Commons, Wilson

¹⁸³ Ibid, p. 115. Jonathan Colman, 'Communication: 'What Now for Britain?' The State Department's Assessment of the 'Special Relationship', 7th February 1968', *Diplomacy and Statecraft*, 19:2 (2008), p. 351.

¹⁸⁴ John Dumbrell, *A Special Relationship: Anglo American Relations from the Cold War to Iraq* (London, 2nd edition, 2006), pp. 160-86.

¹⁸⁵ Busch, *All the Way with JFK?*, p. 5.

¹⁸⁶ Dumbrell and Ellis, 'British Involvement in Peace Initiatives', p. 115.

¹⁸⁷ TNA, PREM 13/1274, Dean (Washington) to Palliser (London), 22nd June 1966 – Dean noted that according to public opinion, although fifty-two per cent of the public were against further action in Vietnam, a significant forty per cent wanted greater use of military power there.

¹⁸⁸ Ibid.

¹⁸⁹ TNA, FO 371/186354, FCO (London) to British Embassy (Washington), Tel. no. 5701, 4th June 1966.

sought to distance the UK from the US's tactics in Vietnam.¹⁹⁰ Regarded by the Americans as a public show of disunity from its closest ally, the statement did little other than exacerbate existing tensions. Already infuriated that its closest ally was prepared to 'share advice, but not responsibility', Johnson made clear his disapproval at Britain's dissociation. As Dumbrell and Ellis make clear, rather than aiding London's credentials, Britain's non-combatant status called in question Wilson's good faith when it came to diplomacy.¹⁹¹

The tension festered, and London's frustration grew at its omission from various US initiatives. In March 1965, London found that it was not informed about the US' plans to use gas in Vietnam – a policy it 'vehemently opposed'.¹⁹² Furthermore, despite numerous British attempts to broker peace deals, the Johnson administration repeatedly negated its efforts. Importantly, Britain was excluded from the main US diplomatic peace effort known as Operation Marigold in 1966, in which the Poles acted as intermediaries for talks with the North Vietnamese regime. To London's vexation, this undermined Wilson's own peace efforts via Soviet Premier Alexei Kosygin.¹⁹³ Taking place in London between November 1966 and February 1967, the Wilson-Kosygin initiative fell through due to a change of conditions demanded by Washington at the very last minute. Although the reasons behind this are disputed – Dumbrell and Ellis, for example, consider it a 'deliberate sabotage' of Wilson's initiative¹⁹⁴ - it was clear that the US had side-lined Britain within the confines of the special relationship.

As Logevall has argued, despite significant reservations about the US's tactics, Wilson saw little value in challenging Washington over its policies over Vietnam.¹⁹⁵ He therefore sought to pursue a dual-track strategy: Britain would provide its ally with strong diplomatic support and promote a

¹⁹⁰ TNA, PREM 13//1274. The sheer intensity and extent of Whitehall's deliberation over the wording of Wilson's statement reflected quite the predicament. Wilson was caught between defending UK values, internal political opposition, and supporting its most important ally.

¹⁹¹ Dumbrell and Ellis, 'British Involvement in Vietnam Peace Initiatives', p. 120.

¹⁹² Ibid, p. 122. Additionally, Wilson and his aides were particularly irritated to discover that the White House had briefed British journalists in Washington on the planned air raids *before* it briefed London. For more, see TNA, FO 371/186354.

¹⁹³ Remarks of Matthew Jones and James Hershberg, 'Negotiating While Fighting', pp. 9-20. Ibid, Ellis, pp. 28-30.

¹⁹⁴ Dumbrell and Ellis, 'British Involvement in Vietnam Peace Initiatives', p. 114.

¹⁹⁵ Fredrik Logevall, *Choosing War: The Lost Chance for Peace and the Escalation of War in Vietnam*, (Berkeley, 1999).

negotiated settlement, whilst also seeking to influence the US by criticising its military tactics, thus seeking to limit their scope.¹⁹⁶ In this context, passing on the Hanoi material was key, not simply in influencing the Americans, but in restoring Britain's credibility in the broader relationship. This did not go unnoticed amongst Foreign Office officials, who observed that the primary aim of the reporting was to ensure that 'what we regard as sensible and balanced material is getting into American deliberations'.¹⁹⁷ However, this also implied a degree of reciprocity; Murray noted that the material was also to 'encourage the Americans in Saigon to give us information about their activities as a quid pro quo', whilst Gordon hinted that passing on the material was 'to be forthcoming with the Americans in order to encourage them to be forthcoming with us'.¹⁹⁸ This sentiment was echoed in a vital letter by Nigel Trent, who suggested that London's best option was to keep the Americans in a 'frame of mind in which they assume it to be worthwhile to keep up the dialogue with us about Vietnam'.¹⁹⁹

Yet, London harboured reservations about precisely which Hanoi material to pass to Washington. Colvin's reporting was being passed on to US officials at a time of fierce internal political debate between 'hawks' and 'doves' over strategy in Vietnam. Consequently, the FCO feared that particular despatches might become 'an admittedly small weapon' in American hands, with each side 'claiming Colvin's views in support of their own'.²⁰⁰ Moreover, commenting from the British Embassy in Washington, Gilmore observed that along with the possibility of 'selected extracts' finding their way to the anti-bombing lobby in the US Congress, there was a danger of Colvin 'being cited in a Congressional squabble'.²⁰¹ These risks extended into the public sphere; Trench expressed wariness that the US press were 'obviously digging around' for Colvin's estimates of bomb damage in Hanoi. At the height of Operation Rolling Thunder, Dean reported to London a *Washington Post*

¹⁹⁶ Dumbrell and Ellis, 'British Involvement in Vietnam Peace Initiatives', p. 118.

¹⁹⁷ TNA, FCO 15/570, Trench (British Embassy, Washington) to Murray (London), 28th March 1967, 'Vietnam: Reporting from Hanoi'.

¹⁹⁸ Ibid; Gordon (Saigon) to Murray (London), 12th April 1967, 'Reporting from Hanoi'.

¹⁹⁹ Ibid, Trench (Washington) to Murray (London), 28th March 1967.

²⁰⁰ TNA, FCO 15/570, Murray (London) to Wilford (British Emb., Washington), 10th October 1967.

²⁰¹ Ibid, Gilmore (Washington) to Fyjis-Walker (London), 31st August 1967.

edition that carried a 'fairly prominent report from London' that Colvin had been instructed to prepare a detail analysis of the US bombing raids in and near Hanoi.²⁰²

London therefore found itself in a delicate position; it was imperative to prevent Colvin's identity – and those of his sources – from being leaked in public,²⁰³ whilst still passing his reports on to the US. Official secrecy thus became an important consideration, especially given the varying standards of different US institutions – the US military, for example, tended to distribute material on a 'flood principle' (high numbers of copies to multiple agencies), thus diluting the 'need to know' basis of circulation. Given the political context, intelligence about the effects of the bombing was being 'bandied about in a heated inter-agency dispute' in Washington, which Colvin's reports risked becoming embroiled in. Furthermore, the leaking of his reports threatened to undermine Britain's policy of discreetly exerting pressure upon the US to minimise the scope of its military activities. London therefore sought to avoid 'prejudicing any flexibility which the Secretary of State may wish to retain on the issue', by surreptitiously withholding certain reports from American hands.²⁰⁴ The Consul-General thus had the authority to indicate to London which documents to withhold, by marking them 'Guard' in transmission (as well as to protect sources).²⁰⁵

In this regard, evidence of bomb damage in Hanoi was a particularly sensitive issue. Avoiding casualties was a key calculation in Wilson's decision to dissociate the UK from the US air raids over Hanoi and Haiphong, and this lent even greater weight to Colvin's post-raid reporting in late 1966 as Operation Rolling Thunder was underway. Countering the US State Department's assessments of the air raids, Colvin detailed the resulting structural damage, such as a raid on 13th December 1966, which destroyed part of the wing of a local high school, the university, and 'a hamlet on the river bank totally destroyed by fire'. Most importantly, his reports of casualties were a key point of consternation

²⁰² TNA, FO 371/186354, Dean (Washington) to FCO (London), Tel. no. 3509, 30th December 1966.

²⁰³ TNA, FCO 15/570, Murray (London) to Gordon (Saigon), 24th July 1967. Murray noted that in passing the Americans the reports, and receiving information in return, a key concern was to protect Colvin's position, and to ensure there was not chance that his reports would be leaked to the press.

²⁰⁴ Ibid, Trench (British Embassy, Washington) to Murray (London), 28th March 1967, 'Vietnam: Reporting from Hanoi'.

²⁰⁵ Ibid, Gordon (Saigon) to Murray (London), 25th January 1967, 'Extract from Minute Saigon, 16th December, 1966'.

between London and Washington. In a raid on 8th December, he reported back figures of 187 casualties, including nine women and eleven children killed.²⁰⁶

His reports placed him at odds with the US leadership, especially over what caused the casualties; Rusk, for example, denied in his press statements any allegations that US ordnance fell over Hanoi, though he did note expended ordnance being dropped. By contrast, in a despatch that was passed onto the State Department, Colvin maintained that some of the damage and casualties were caused by air-to-ground rockets exploding in civilian areas, and that the damage to the high school was caused by bombs, either by pilot error or in reply to anti-aircraft fire'.²⁰⁷ Furthermore, Colvin's on-the-ground reporting highlighted the limits of the US's reliance upon technical intelligence. On occasion, the US was unable to answer questions the British Foreign Secretary posed over civilian casualty estimates, because in some instances, smoke in target areas following the strikes prevented post-strike photography by US planes.²⁰⁸ Yet, Colvin's positioning at the centre of the raids was such that he was able to observe the impact first-hand; he described witnessing parts of a rocket with the marking still on in the damaged Rumanian Embassy, and validated reporting by a French journalist on the extent of destruction in towns such as Yen Vien or Gia Lam.²⁰⁹ Lastly, Colvin's observations also captured the more aggressive aspect of the US's air raids. Noting in one instance that US aircraft flew above the area for forty-five minutes without touching the obvious military targets, he concluded that the targets were so small and of such risk to aircraft that high, that the motive could only have been 'deliberate warning of worse to come' if Hanoi continued the war.²¹⁰

One of Colvin's most astute despatches advised London of the DRVN's most effective means of undermining the US political campaign: through attacking morale. In addition to its military campaign, the DRVN sought to undermine the US politically, by corroding its relationship with its population and, crucially, its allies. Central to this long-term effort was an 'exposé of the results of American bombing' – of which casualties were key. Writing to London, Colvin felt obliged to express

²⁰⁶ TNA, FO 371/186354, Colvin (Hanoi) to FCO (London), Tel. no. 246, 8th December 1966.

²⁰⁷ Ibid, Colvin (Hanoi) to FCO (London), Tel. no. 257, 19th December 1966.

²⁰⁸ Ibid, 'United States Telegram'.

²⁰⁹ Ibid, Colvin (Hanoi) to FCO (London), Tel. no. 257, 19th December 1966; Colvin (Hanoi) to FCO (London), Tel. no. 282, 30th December 1966.

²¹⁰ Ibid, Colvin (Hanoi) to FCO (London), Tel. no. 282, 30th December 1966.

his belief that ‘there have been instances for American carelessness’, which would be easy for the North Vietnamese to ‘exploit to uncommitted observers’ and hard for the Americans to defend.²¹¹ Wilson’s dissociation of the UK from the US bombings of Hanoi and Haiphong would therefore have played into Hanoi’s hands. Indeed, this sentiment was not lost on observers within the British Embassy in Washington. Though written somewhat derisively, Gilmore stated to the FCO his observation that the ‘row’ going on in both Washington and internationally over the raids was a ‘testimonial to the excellence of the advice to the North Vietnamese authorities’ described in Colvin’s despatch.²¹²

Because of these tensions, intelligence from Hanoi was about rivalry as well as co-operation. Numerous instances arose in which London decided *against* passing on the Hanoi material to the Americans, owing to a combination of political and security reasons. For example, Trench made mention of material withheld from Washington about the presence of Cubans in North Vietnam; political circumstances at the time suggested that the information ‘might blow back on us in the context of British-flag shipping to North Vietnam’. Similarly, he pointed to other withheld letters that contained information of lesser value, though still ‘just the stuff of which subaltern gossip is made’. Trench also sought to ensure that London was careful about its allies – he underscored the importance of not passing on material that showed the French, Indians, or Canadians ‘in a mischievous role’, not to protect them, but to protect the UK by preventing blowback. Interestingly, the same applied for the actions of US citizens, in case of being swept up ‘in some contentious security case’.

Ultimately, passing on the Hanoi material was constantly assessed against a reading of temperament in Washington.²¹³ Caution at how the reports’ occasional ambiguous tone might be exploited in political circles determined that several of Colvin’s reports were not exchanged with Washington. This was due to the fact that they ‘certainly stimulated interest...if only for the questions

²¹¹ TNA, FO 371/186345, Colvin (Hanoi) to Brown MP (London), Despatch no. 6, 22nd November 1966.

²¹² Ibid, Gilmore (British Embassy, Washington) to Waterstone (FCO), 14th December 1966, ‘Bombing of North Vietnam’.

²¹³ TNA, FCO 15/570, Trench (British Embassy, Washington) to Murray (London), 28th March 1967, ‘Vietnam: Reporting from Hanoi’.

it has left unanswered'.²¹⁴ Commenting on one of Colvin's despatches about the DRVN's intentions and morale, for example, Dean decided not to pass the despatch on, because it risked giving some Americans 'misleading ideas of what is in our own minds, without bearing on possibilities which have any real interest in Washington'.²¹⁵ Because these same despatches were drawn upon 'heavily' in drafting the briefs for the British Secretary of State's visit to Moscow in 1967, as well as British JIC assessments on the effects of US air raids on North Vietnamese morale, it is quite likely that London enjoyed a more accurate appreciation of the real impact of Operation "Rolling Thunder" than Washington.²¹⁶²¹⁷

The Value of Secret Intelligence

Despite Britain's instrumental use of intelligence, a good proportion of the material was passed to Washington. What were termed 'relatively straightforward letters' from Hanoi were despatched to the State Department, the US Information Agency, and the CIA 'at about Director level'. More sensitive material, such as the reports of bomb damage, 'we brought ourselves, one copy only' to the State Department, then considered the safest pair of hands and the most concerned.²¹⁸

Interestingly, in an incident following the expulsion of a Canadian intelligence officer from Hanoi, an opportunity presented itself to London. Noting that the combination of publicity on Canadian reports from North Vietnam – some of which quoted Colvin directly as a source²¹⁹ - along with the officer's expulsion would have dried up the flow of Canadian material to the Americans, this had implications for any material that London might want to pass on to Washington – 'with a

²¹⁴ Ibid, Murray (London) to Wilford (British Emb., Washington), 10th October 1967.

²¹⁵ TNA, FCO 15/648, Dean (Washington) to FCO (London), Tel. no. 1686, 19th May 1967.

²¹⁶ Ibid, Fyjis-Walker (London) to Colvin (Hanoi), 18 May 1967.

²¹⁷ Priest and Hughes, 'American and British Intelligence on South Vietnam', p. 199. Priest and Hughes argue similarly; their comparative piece on American and British strategic intelligence assessments of South Vietnam arrives at the 'curious position' that owing to primarily political and institutional factors, the Joint Intelligence Committee's assessment 63(20) seemed 'more accurate – or at least more prescient' than the National Intelligence Estimate 53-63.

²¹⁸ Ibid, Trench (British Embassy, Washington) to Murray (London), 28 March 1967.

²¹⁹ TNA, FCO, 15/570, Gordon (Saigon) to Murray (London), 29th August 1967.

predisposition to try and give the State Department rather more than at present'.²²⁰ The implications for intelligence exchange were clear. By providing the Americans with first-hand intelligence 'from a place where they had no representation of their own', operating on the principle of 'maximum transmission' elevated Britain's status as an intelligence partner, if not a diplomatic one.²²¹

Crucially, Colvin was invited to the American Embassy in Saigon for consultations.²²² The Saigon embassy also housed one of the largest CIA stations in the world, and it was clear that the invitation was another means of garnering intelligence on Hanoi that the Americans were unable to attain otherwise. In a key consultation with Saigon in mid-December 1966, Colvin discussed political and military developments in Hanoi, such as the North Vietnamese leadership's attitudes towards the bombing campaign, access to the Hanoi elite and a move towards guerrilla warfare tactics in the South.²²³ It was clear that political attitudes, influence, and strategy were all elements that the American intelligence machine was unable to capture, above all without its own personnel at the heart of Hanoi. When Ambassador Eugene Locke, one of Lyndon B. Johnson's close personal friends, reported to him from Saigon in November 1967, the entire section about Hanoi was based on a conversation with Stewart who had just replaced Colvin.²²⁴

Significantly, upon their return to London, the Consul-Generals were also invited to Washington for further consultations. Most notably, they were received at CIA headquarters in Langley, VA, where in addition to being consulted by middle-ranking officers (both operations and intelligence), they met with the Director of Central Intelligence. Described by one former Consul-General as being like 'thirsty people with nothing to drink', the level of detail requested by the CIA was revealing. They sought information on virtually all aspects of North Vietnamese life, including minute details on rations, morale, the historical background of the Vietnamese, their habits, and their

²²⁰ Ibid, Gilmore (Washington) to Murray (London), 29th September 1967, 'Canadian Reports from Hanoi'.

²²¹ Ibid, Gordon (Saigon) to Murray (London), 12th April 1967, 'Reporting from Hanoi'.

²²² It is worth noting that the FCO did not arrange briefings itself – all correspondence happened via the British Ambassador in Saigon. Stewart, in discussion with the author, 2014.

²²³ Ibid, American Embassy (Saigon) to State Department (Washington), Airgram No. A-342, 14 December 1966, 'Views of British Consul-General on North Vietnamese Developments'.

²²⁴ Rostow to Johnson, 27 November 1967, enclosing report from Locke, 25 November 1967, LBJ Library, copy at 0240817016, Vietnam Archive, Texas Tech University.

resistance to the foreign invader. Curiously, this took precedence over information about the bombing campaign, which was left more to the remit of the US Navy.²²⁵

As we have seen, London was not beyond holding intelligence back from Washington. Colvin's view that Hanoi was implacable in the face of American airpower suited London well, given that Wilson wanted a cessation to the bombing. But on 8 August 1967, Colvin sent an uncharacteristic despatch suggesting North Vietnam might be beginning to crack under the strain of the increasing bombardment. Most of the senior diplomats in Hanoi had fled and were officially 'absent or about to depart on leave', including the Bulgarian, Cuban, Czech, Hungarian, Pathet Lao, Polish, Rumanian and Soviet Representatives. The Chinese and Indonesian representatives had also been absent for months. This was an 'indication of the seriousness with which the DRVN's communist allies regard the present juncture', accompanied by substantive medical evidence that between 60% and 90% of children were now showing signs of malnutrition.²²⁶

This momentary aberration in Colvin's reporting promoted intense discussion in London. Should this despatch be given to the Americans? The effect on the Americans would 'be to confirm them in their belief that their bombing policy is on the right track and they should keep on with it', observed Fyjis-Walker in London. 'This, of course, will produce political difficulties here'. He envisaged the Americans quoting Colvin back at their Ministers in support of the air war. The question drifted upwards to Sir Arthur De la Mare, the Assistant Under-Secretary who superintended Asia, who deemed that it should be withheld.²²⁷ Britain's Washington Embassy was sent an immediate message telling them: 'You should not, repeat not, show Hanoi Despatch No.7 to the Americans'.²²⁸²²⁹ Colvin later joked that these Foreign Office officials had 'lost the Vietnam War' because they had refused to show the Americans his despatch claiming that the North Vietnamese were about to crack

²²⁵ Personal information.

²²⁶ TNA, FCO 15/481, Despatch No. 7, Colvin (Hanoi) to Brown (London), August 1967.

²²⁷ TNA, FCO 15/481, 'Vietnam: Hanoi Despatch No. 7', Fyjis-Walker, 18 August 1967; FCO 15/481, minute, de la Mare, 21 August 1967.

²²⁸ Ibid, 'Teine 9125', London to Washington, 21 August 1967.

²²⁹ A similar withholding of a despatch to the Americans can be found in FCO 15/648, which detailed Colvin's impression of North Vietnamese views of the war's escalation.

under American bombing.' In fact, later reporting suggested the North Vietnamese were ready to evacuate their capital and move 'up country' to continue the war if necessary.²³⁰

Oddly, Colvin's greatest intelligence success was *against* the Americans. In late 1966, he uncovered the fact that unknown to the British, the Americans had been continuing elaborate secret talks on Vietnam, known as 'Operation Marigold', thus undermining the parallel efforts by the Wilson government. The *New York Times* journalist Harrison Salisbury inadvertently gave the game away to Colvin after his own private discussion with the Vietnamese Prime Minister Phm Van Dong. This embarrassed Rusk, who apologised to Wilson at length. Wilson was advised by his Private Secretary for Foreign Affairs, Michael Palliser, that 'it is quite clear that if Rusk's hand had not been forced by the fact that Harrison Salisbury has talked to our man in Hanoi (Colvin) about these exchanges with North Vietnamese Ministers, we should still know nothing of the exchanges ... that have been going on for the last six months'. He added: 'I think the Foreign Secretary will have good reason to feel pretty aggrieved at the way he has been treated by Rusk'. Palliser thought that Colvin had uncovered 'a rather gloomy story of muddle, lack of confidence, and incompetence' by the Americans.²³¹ However, Wilson was not telling Washington everything either. A month later, he explained to the Soviet Premier Alexei Kosygin that Britain in effect had North Vietnamese 'representatives' in London masquerading as press reporters. Wilson stayed in touch with them via his own Parliamentary Private Secretary, Ernest Fernyhough, who was 'an old friend of Ho Chi Minh's'. Kosygin observed that he thought Colvin's presence in Hanoi was 'a good thing'.²³²

Conclusion: A Voice from the Dark Side of the Moon²³³

²³⁰ Fyjis-Walker, 'Negotiating While Fighting', pp. 31-32.

²³¹ TNA, PREM 13/1917, Palliser to Wilson, 5 January 1967.

²³² TNA, PREM 13/1917, 'Record of a Conversation between the Prime Minister and Mr Kosygin at 3.30 on Monday', 6 February 1967.

²³³ Kear, 'The British Consulate-General in Hanoi', p. 236.

The value of the British intelligence was clear, and duly conveyed by the American leadership. In 1971, the US Ambassador wrote to the UK Secretary of State on the instructions of the US Secretary of State William Rogers wishing to express his appreciation for Liudzius' reporting from Hanoi, stating that this had 'added considerably to our knowledge about North Vietnam'.²³⁴ Commenting upon this letter, Douglas-Home remarked that the Americans had, 'on many occasions' informally expressed how valued the Hanoi reports were, described as 'one of their few first-hand sources of information' on life in North Vietnam.²³⁵ However, the consultations were what turned out to be subject of the most praise. London was constantly wary that were the Americans to discover any omissions from the Hanoi material, or indeed, were the reports to cease being passed on altogether, then it should expect relations with the Americans to 'suffer accordingly'. Remarkably, Gordon added that same would apply, were London to 'keep John Colvin away from the Americans' during his trips to Saigon.²³⁶ The value of the Consul-Generals was such that Arch Calhoun, Minister Counsellor for Political Affairs at the US Embassy in Saigon, had reiterated to Gordon 'how much they valued the opportunity' to talk Colvin, adding that the information was 'very useful to the small number of people in the American Embassy who saw it' – the latter most likely being CIA officers.²³⁷

Yet as Young has emphasised, Vietnam was not a British foreign policy priority, and was treated accordingly in the Foreign Office.²³⁸ The British Consulate-General in Hanoi therefore confronts us with two curious paradoxes. First, a small and beleaguered outpost that was little cared for in London held a greater significance for the Americans and the prosecution of their war; even FCO officials acknowledged that Britain's role in Vietnam was 'eroded' by its support of US policy.²³⁹ Yet, Vietnam was a British concern insofar as it constituted a delicate issue in Anglo-American relations. Indeed, as Priest and Hughes note, Britain was not directly involved in the war; British intelligence therefore provided a British perspective 'on a largely American problem' as well

²³⁴ TNA, FCO 15/1474, Annenberg (London) to Douglas-Home (London), 1 December 1971.

²³⁵ Ibid, Grattan (London) to Annenberg (US Amb., Washington), 8th December 1971.

²³⁶ TNA, FCO 15/570, Gordon (Saigon) to Murray (London), 12th April 1967, 'Reporting from Hanoi'.

²³⁷ Ibid.

²³⁸ Young, 'The Wilson Government and the Davies Peace Mission', p. 87.

²³⁹ TNA, FO 371/186407, Shepherd, Hanoi, to de la Mare, London, May 1966.

as on Britain's principal ally itself.²⁴⁰ The peculiar position of the Consuls was reflected in the varying levels of appreciation shown by their superiors. Stewart recalls that on his return to the UK, virtually none of the Foreign Office staff took an interest in his activities in Hanoi.²⁴¹ The only exception was the Head of the South East Asia Department, Donald Murray, who expressed his gratitude for the 'volume and quality' of reporting since the revocation of cypher rights several months earlier.²⁴² Yet, both the Prime Minister and the Foreign Secretary received the Consuls-General in London for personal consultations, which was most unusual for any diplomat.²⁴³ Moreover, they were showered with Americans messages of appreciation, including a fulsome letter from Rusk.²⁴⁴ As one FCO official remarked, much of the value was knowing that 'this Anglo-American liaison is appreciated at a high level in the United States'.²⁴⁵

Second, the Consulate was revealing of the broader dynamics of what we might call the 'inverse' Special Relationship. John Tusa once stated that there were three categories of people who searched for the truth in their work: academics, journalists, and diplomats. To this, one of the former Consul-Generals added spies.²⁴⁶ At a time when Anglo-American relations were characterised by their 'inherent complexity, secrecy, and indeed...by the tentativeness of contacts between Washington and Hanoi',²⁴⁷ the British intelligence was able to counterbalance broader tensions that plagued Britain's non-involvement in the ground war in Vietnam. Although limited in scope, the intelligence reaffirmed the UK as a key ally; it 'made the US feel we weren't fighting, we were on the same side'.²⁴⁸ As one of the Consul-Generals observed, the Hanoi Consulate effectively had Britain 'punching above its weight', in the broader special relationship. In a conflict in which the US had committed one million

²⁴⁰ Priest and Hughes, 'American and British Intelligence on South Vietnam', pp. 183-184.

²⁴¹ Stewart, interview with the author, 2013.

²⁴² TNA, FCO 15/578, Stewart (Hanoi) to Smith (London), 7 March 1968.

²⁴³ Colvin, *Twice Around the World*, p.107. The Foreign Secretary, George Brown put off Cabinet meetings to see Colvin. In their meetings he asked about the possibilities for Vietnamese negotiations based on Colvin's knowledge of Hanoi politics - Colvin offered little hope.

²⁴⁴ TNA, FCO 15/578, Stewart (Hanoi) to Smith (London), 7 March 1968.

²⁴⁵ TNA, FCO 15/1474, Gordon (London) to Tomlinson (London), 7 December 1971.

²⁴⁶ Private information.

²⁴⁷ Dumbrell and Ellis, *British Involvement in Vietnam Peace Initiatives*,

²⁴⁸ Stewart, in discussion with the author, 2014.

troops, and the UK none, the intelligence to emerge from Hanoi was a contribution 'totally impossible to value'.²⁴⁹

In intelligence terms, the 1960s were regarded as a tumultuous period for MI6, with many calling into question the utility of traditional intelligence gathering.²⁵⁰ GCHQ, computers and technical intelligence were devouring more and more of the British budget.²⁵¹ Sir Dick White, Chief of MI6 during this period, believed that the survival of the service 'depended upon its relationship with Washington', and so reporting from locations where the Americans lacked representation such as Hanoi, Havana, and Peking took on a greater importance.²⁵² MI6 officers in the Hanoi Consulate underlined how Britain's smaller outposts were able to some extent, to 'offset the asymmetry' of the Special Relationship.²⁵³ Richard Helms, Director of Central Intelligence in the late 1960s, later confirmed that the declining Anglo-American partnership was 'saved' by the 'good advice' offered by a relatively small number of British diplomats and intelligence officers.²⁵⁴ Hanoi was also important for MI6. It provided good internal diplomacy within Whitehall at a time of growing mistrust of intelligence activity, especially by the CIA - something that was only intensified by Watergate.²⁵⁵

The Hanoi Consulate also represented a reversal of trends during the boom years of technical intelligence collection, led by GCHQ and its sister organisation the US National Security Agency. With this new global intelligence industry came growing professionalisation, and a perceived separation from parallel activities, including diplomacy and military service. Yet we can now see that conceiving of intelligence officers narrowly and only in terms of espionage can be problematic. As the case of Hanoi showed, the stationing of British intelligence officers in diplomatic posts was valuable in providing the West with 'eyes and ears' into North Vietnam. MI6 officers serving as Consul-Generals operated in the twilight between diplomacy and intelligence, illustrating that intelligence

²⁴⁹ Ibid.

²⁵⁰ Corera, *The Art of Betrayal*, p. 133.

²⁵¹ Richard J. Aldrich, 'Counting the Cost of Intelligence: The Treasury, National Service and GCHQ', *English Historical Review*, 128: 532 (2013), pp. 596-8.

²⁵² Bower, *The Perfect English Spy*, p. 353.

²⁵³ Aldrich, *Intelligence and the War Against Japan*, p. 454.

²⁵⁴ Bower, *The Perfect English Spy*, p. 353.

²⁵⁵ Corera, *The Art of Betrayal*, pp. 102-103.

often has 'untidy and sometimes artificial boundaries'.²⁵⁶ The information that was most valued was part espionage, part diplomatic reporting, but also part sociological observation. In this case, the blurring of these institutional boundaries was precisely what enabled valuable intelligence collection where formal avenues were lacking. In October 1971, pondering why the British were still in Hanoi, despite the growing counterintelligence obstacles erected by the DVRN, Consul-General Liudzius captured the reason with limpid clarity: '...however dark the glass through which HM Consul-General is obliged to peer, the post provides just about the only window which the Western world has on events in North Vietnam'.²⁵⁷

²⁵⁶ Herman, 'Diplomacy and Intelligence', p. 6.

²⁵⁷ TNA, FCO 15/1474, 'Some Reflections on a Year in Hanoi', Liudzius (Hanoi) to Tomlinson (London), October 1971.

Writing intelligence history has often invited the accusation of becoming the intellectual and political prisoner of government. The release of officially-sanctioned histories, such as Jeffrey's substantial history of SIS, and the weighty study of MI5 by Chris Andrew,¹ both produced for the purpose of celebrating centenaries, generated considerable criticism along the lines of being too closely tied to official documents provided by the institutions they served, whilst not incorporating wider sources. This was especially true of the Jeffery volume which made little effort to engage with the considerable SIS papers available at Kew.

More widely, Scott and Jackson, the leading figures at the respected centre for intelligence studies at Aberystwyth, objected to the degree of 'collaboration' between academia and the British intelligence agencies, emphasising the 'sanctuary' of objectivity that the ivory tower should provide from official narratives. Similarly, Anthony Glees pointed to the risk of 'whitewashing' the more nefarious aspects of such institutions and their pasts.² Andrew himself discovered, to his considerable irritation, that after security censorship by MI5, there was a further layer of deletions imposed by the Cabinet Office on more political grounds before his manuscript was cleared.³ These criticisms epitomise the tension that continues to characterise the researcher's relationship with the archive, and reliance upon official documents when it comes to studying a field as elusive as intelligence. Through its examination of a lesser known area of British intelligence history, and by picking apart at

¹ Andrew, *Defend the Realm*; Jeffrey, *MI6*. Goodman's recent history of the JIC by contrast engages widely with the material at Kew.

² Moran, 'Coming to Clarity', pp. 46-47.

³ Jason Lewis and Tom Harper, 'Revealed: How MI5 bugged 10 Downing Street, the Cabinet and at least five Prime Ministers for 15 Years', *Daily Mail*, 18 April 2010.

conventional categories that define the boundaries of intelligence, this thesis has sought to challenge this assertion. The archive is too complex to be controlled by the ‘history police’, despite the best efforts of government. By attacking neglected files and using new electronic methods to comb them, it has ultimately sought to demonstrate the utility of uncovering a previously hidden facet of one of Britain’s most secretive intelligence agencies, and to explore its implications in a broader context.

Reviewing the uneven landscape of the existing scholarship on intelligence, several interlinked areas stand out that illustrate the necessity of new forays into British intelligence history. Firstly, the Cold War history of the SIS is remarkably unknown, especially by contrast with its sister service MI5. This is partly because the official history stops disappointedly in 1949, but also because the SIS is not obliged to pass its records onto The National Archives at Kew – and indeed may never do so. Although historians have discovered ways to circumvent such restrictions, as discussed in the methodology, intelligence history as a sub-field increasingly gives attention to areas where the authorities have seen fit to release documents, allowing government to steer scholarship in a way that is unattractive, and possibly even unhealthy.

To some extent, intelligence history has been driven by public obsessions. The treachery of the Cambridge Five and its resulting ‘molemania’ has gripped scholars for decades, and scholarly attention has also focused on more accessible intelligence-related institutions, such as the Special Operations Executive, or the wartime efforts of Bletchley Park. By contrast, as discussed in the literature review chapter, SIS’s history lies in a fragmented, weaker condition. Although a cluster of seminal pieces on SIS exist, these tend towards a generalised history of the agency; individual case studies lack the depth that can challenge definitional categories or conventional norms as this thesis has sought to do. The works of Dorril, Jeffery, West, Davies, and Bower detail various episodes in SIS’s history, but these are mostly narrow ‘regimental histories’ or biography without real evaluation of SIS’s contribution to the bigger picture in which intelligence operated.⁴

⁴ Dorril, *Inside the World of Her Majesty’s Secret Intelligence Service*; Jeffery, *MI6: The History of the Secret Intelligence Service*; West, *MI6: British Secret Intelligence Service Operations*; Davies, *MI6 and the Machinery of Spying: Structure and Process in Britain’s Secret Intelligence Service*;

Furthermore, the problematic geographical distribution of this scholarship cannot be overlooked. Despite some work on British involvement in the Vietnam War (even then, attention is cast upon South Vietnam, with little reference to North), evidence of SIS's history is especially thin in the Asian Cold War theatre.⁵ Seminal pieces fail to pick apart at SIS's regional intelligence collection efforts beyond the World Wars, and somewhat worryingly, the role of intelligence in regional diplomatic negotiations and peace talks has been severely understudied. Whilst the same cannot be said of GCHQ's history in the region, of which there exists a greater depth of research, gaps still remain; the volume of literature on Cold War signals intelligence in Asia is confined to a nucleus of core pieces on Indonesia and Hong Kong, in addition to Aldrich's broader history of Anglo-American global signals intelligence, which lends some coverage to Asia. Again, the availability of sources is very much a key factor; as previously discussed in the methodology chapter, the closure and retention of certain high-level Foreign Office and Prime Ministerial files pertaining to Asia indicates a clear degree of sensitivity over signals *and* human intelligence from these locations. Compared to the Soviet Union, Europe and the Middle East, Asia has therefore remained an understudied component of British intelligence history, which this thesis has accordingly sought to address.

Asia also presented a specific opportunity to address these empirical lacunae through challenging conceptual boundaries. Conventional definitions of 'intelligence' as a term vary in how they understand intelligence activities, actors, processes, and outcomes. Accordingly, the different levels of analysis associated with interpretations of what intelligence is has resulted in varying boundaries for intelligence definitions; some scholars adopt all-encompassing definitions of intelligence that include 'information', whilst others rely upon narrower understandings that centre themselves around one of intelligence's core characteristics – that of secrecy. In an attempt to move beyond conventional understandings, this thesis has sought to challenge this definitional dichotomy by examining intelligence through the lens of a different actor: the diplomat-intelligence officer, whose crossover role has been historically present between different institutions across British imperial

Corera, *The Art of Betrayal: The Secret History of MI6*; Bower, *Red Web: MI6 and the KGB Master Coup*.

⁵ Busch, *All the Way with JFK*.

history. Approaching the notion of ‘intelligence’ as something akin to a spectrum, rather than a bounded or rigid concept, has enabled the exploration of intelligence not necessarily gathered through clandestine methods. A thesis focused on the stationing of SIS officers in British diplomatic offices in Hong Kong, Beijing, and Hanoi, regionally located in the Asian theatre, has therefore facilitated a study of the nexus between covert *and* overt intelligence collection.

With these issues in mind, the central research questions for this thesis were therefore formulated as:

- What kinds of intelligence were the British able to gather in Asia during the Cold War, and how was this achieved?
- What was the significance of this intelligence?
- How did it relate to the ‘Special Relationship’ between the UK and the US?
- How does this change our understanding of what intelligence is?

The three case studies presented in this thesis – Hong Kong, Beijing, and Hanoi - have therefore been chosen because they directly address these questions, linking Britain’s imperial legacy with intelligence collection abroad. In doing so, they have produced a contribution to knowledge that uncovers a fresh dimension of the British SIS’s history, as well as, to a lesser extent, British signals intelligence collection in Asia during the Cold War. Dissecting this contribution along thematic lines, it can be broken down into three main areas: intelligence collection; the dual identity diplomat-intelligence officer; and British intelligence with regard to the Anglo-American Special Relationship. Alongside this, it has also shed some light on the importance of embassies as remarkable sites of low level contestations during the Cold war.

Firstly, British officers were able to gather both human intelligence and signals intelligence from their respective posts across Asia. Drawing upon the notion of intelligence as a ‘spectrum’, the British were able to collect a range of overt and covert intelligence; demonstrating the diversity of material they had access to between the different posts examined, the former ranged from open source

publications, and interactions with both the native and expatriate elites in the capital cities, to socio-political and economic observations informed by short travels into other parts of China by the British staff. The latter included human intelligence derived from agent running in Hong Kong, to signals intelligence gathering from the British officers in both Hong Kong and Beijing. Furthermore, the very content of the intelligence gathered was reflective of changing intelligence requirements in Britain; reporting and intelligence material harvested on the Sino-Soviet rivalry, atomic weapon development, and the inner workings and dynamics of host country governments (particularly Beijing), pointed to the growing significance of China as a Cold War intelligence target.

Secondly, the means by which the intelligence was collected underscores the importance of challenging conventional understandings and boundaries that have dominated the debate over of how intelligence is defined. Across all three posts in Asia, SIS officers were stationed in diplomatic positions, affording them a crossover role that brought together the advantages of both traditional intelligence and diplomatic skills. In addition to political reporting from diplomatic circles that these officers had access to, their astute observational skills and ability to capture detail – particularly of a military nature – allowed them to operate effectively from within severely constrained security environments. In addition to making sense of the complex, chaotic intelligence landscapes in both Hong Kong and Beijing, the intelligence background of these officers enabled them to navigate the societies amongst which they operated. It also enabled them to endure the general air of ‘spy phobia’ that seemed to captivate local audiences in the 1960, typifying the aversion to Western officials operating abroad during especially intense episodes of the Cold War. Remarkably, some of the most valued reporting was the local observance of the everyday life in these secret towns, albeit carefully interpreted through the eyes of professional intelligence officers who, akin to Sherlock Homes, would often make important deductions about the state of those societies from small, but significant details.

Furthermore, these dual identity roles enabled such officers to circumvent the rather uncompromising restrictions placed upon the British diplomatic premises, most notably when it came to communications channels. In many ways, 1967 was a year of crisis for the British in Asia; across all three stations, the British had to endure riots in Hong Kong, the ransacking of the embassy in Beijing, and the loss of cypher channels in Hanoi. Although the intelligence identity of the officers

posed a significant risk during such volatile periods, it was also a useful resource. Their ability to rely upon diplomatic allies and premises to communicate with London turned out to be a vital instrument in maintaining channels that doubled as avenues for political reporting and intelligence dissemination, without overly raising suspicions. Therefore, by challenging conceptual boundaries, the blurring of boundaries between diplomat and intelligence officer has thus allowed for the discovery of a new dimension of British history that moves away from the more traditional focus upon clandestine collection methods and covert action. In some ways this is also an old dimension, for in the nineteenth century, before professionalization, intelligence was a space inhabited by the amateur adventurer, the archaeologist, and the butterfly collector.⁶

Thirdly, the intelligence that the British were able to collect in Asia held significant ramifications for Britain's broader standing in a period of perceived weakness. Since the onset of the Cold War, the British Empire had been a steady state of decline; wounded by imperial overstretch, declining economic power, and waning diplomatic influence upon the emerging superpowers from the Second World War, not to mention its own self-belief, Britain's standing diminished on the international stage. As Britain fought to contain zealous nationalist insurgencies across the 1950s and 1960s, it ceded substantial influence through the gradual loss of its imperial territories, including India, Kenya, and Ceylon, to name but a few. The reverberations were significant for Britain's foreign policy conduct in the Asian theatre; the constraints imposed upon Britain's power shaped a much more conciliatory approach to international relations, in which it maintained relationships – and importantly, a physical diplomatic presence – in countries considered somewhat adversarial, such as China. Contrasting with the more aggressive stance pursued by the United States in Vietnam, Korea, and territories outside of the Asian sphere, such as Suez and Grenada, Britain's shift in foreign policy damaged relations with its greatest ally, engendering a firmly-rooted 'diplomatic divergence' between the two. Seen from the major world capitals, Britain was largely considered to have reduced down to being the junior partner in the Anglo-American 'Special Relationship'.

⁶ Satyia, *Spies of Arabia*, pp. 12-34.

However, the intelligence Britain gathered from Asia proved to be, in several respects, a counterbalance to its declining international standing. As the likes of Aldrich and Dumbrell have argued, military and intelligence linkages often held a greater resilience than those of diplomatic ties between the two countries. This was especially important considering the significant intelligence problems that the United States faced; on the one hand, the US's intent focus during the Cold War upon the Soviet Union and Communism had resulted in it giving 'far less attention to the rest of the world'.⁷ On the other hand, as a consequence of its own, uncompromising approach to foreign policy into the 1960s, the US found itself lacking diplomatic representation in core target countries such as China, and Vietnam. Aside from technical means, by the early 1960s, the American intelligence community was virtually blind in cities such as Beijing and Hanoi – locations in which the British had SIS officers stationed. Similarly, in Hong Kong, clashing with the British Governor, the United States encountered significant difficulties waging covert operations and human intelligence collection in the British colony, resulting in the loss of important networks and personnel it had sought to develop as an inroad into China. There were limits to America's presence within this important British watchtower.

The intelligence gathered in Asia afforded Britain a gravitas that resonated within the decision-making elite in the US. No other country outside the Communist Bloc operated a global intelligence network, and the United States valued not only exchanging raw data, but also this wider analysis. Britain's intelligence gave the Americans alternative perspectives on the politics of hostile regimes, military intelligence on adversary planning that informed targets for air strikes, the degree of damage inflicted upon societal fabrics through degradation of economies and morale, and insight into political rivalries on both an internal and external level. Intelligence collected by the dual diplomat-intelligence officer therefore resulted in granular detail from within hostile territories that were fed to senior levels of leadership in the US defence and intelligence community, including, in some instances, the American President himself. At a strategic level, this was illustrative of the impact and influence intelligence is able to have upon foreign policy; the British intelligence bridged a gap at a

⁷ Loch K. Johnson, 'Introduction', in Loch K. Johnson (eds.), *Handbook of Intelligence Studies*, (Abingdon, 2007), pp. 8-9.

time of the diverging foreign policies between the two allies, soothing ‘transatlantic antagonism’, mistrust, and even resentment by American officials at Britain’s inability to exert a stronger hand internationally or contribute military force, typically in the context of Vietnam. As global decline in the 1960s eroded Britain’s capacity as a reliable military partner, Britain’s response had been to construct a new myth: one in which a revised relationship with the Americans based increasingly on intelligence and special forces which would ‘preserve the illusion of imperial power’.⁸ Intelligence offered a softer means of influencing the relationship, providing what the US could not acquire by its own means, and by extension, also addressing Britain’s own shortcomings. It can therefore be seen that Britain’s intelligence machinery in Asia contributed to reducing the asymmetry of the Special Relationship.

But what of the dual identity diplomat-intelligence officer? To what extent does this allow us to challenge the manner in which intelligence can be understood more broadly? The answer is perhaps to be found elsewhere in Britain’s global intelligence network. In the Asian sphere, there was clearly a tenable link between Britain’s residual empire and its intelligence collection outposts from diplomatic officers. This was particularly so in areas in which the Americans were not politically able to operate; in comparison to peripheral location such as Taiwan, which the US stalwartly recognised until 1975, direct British outposts in Beijing and Hong Kong held greater value – what should be understood as the intelligence value of ‘diplomatic divergence’. However, similar situations prevailed in British diplomatic premises across the world during the Cold War. SIS officers were stationed in countries such as Havana and Luanda – again, places in which the US lacked a presence – illustrating the richness of depth Britain had across its intelligence network. Extended to more recent decades, SIS officers also operated from significantly higher-risk locations where there were no Americans, including Teheran and Pyongyang, exponentially increasing the worth of their reporting from such ‘enemy’ territories.

Alongside human agents, there is the more opaque issue of signals intelligence. Britain’s global intelligence network was not confined to human intelligence; signals intercepts and

⁸ Jeffreys-Jones, *In Spies We Trust*, pp. 128-129.

communications monitoring comprised the other core component to Britain's collection capability. As previously discussed, the Diplomatic Wireless Service (DWS) took on a secondary role of acting as a secret monitoring service that operated from within British Embassies and High Commissions – essentially, its staff were 'forward operators' for GCHQ.⁹ This practice encompassed more than the DWS. During the 1980s, the British embassies in Moscow, Nairobi, Pretoria, and Lilongwe were utilised for signals monitoring. In Asia as has been seen, both Beijing and Ulan Bator were part of this network.¹⁰ The likelihood also existed that the missions in Accra, Budapest, Cairo, Freetown, Prague, and Warsaw, took on similar functions,¹¹ in which British intelligence officers operated from the overlap between their diplomatic communications, speech security and signals intelligence roles. Easter argues that GCHQ likely used some of these sites during the 1960s, and his reasoning is historically rooted; it has been claimed that as far back as the 1950s, 'approximately fifteen British embassies had a permanent GCHQ presence', though this had supposedly been reduced down to four by the 1980s.¹² This raises interesting avenues as to further research of this 'dual identity'. Tracing the path of both British intelligence officers to acquire the intelligence, and the path the raw intelligence took before reaching its transatlantic consumers was merely one means of approaching this aspect of British intelligence history. However, it is clear that with the tantalising evidence pointing to a hidden signals intelligence story of field activity in embassies, there is another relatively untouched area of British intelligence history; the future release of archival files that are currently still classified, contains the potential for further chapters to be unearthed in both SIS and GCHQ's not-so-distant past. Moreover, moving beyond a reliance upon official written documents will 'rescue from oblivion the gaps in knowledge' on both institutions, pushing intelligence historians towards a more reflexive

⁹ Aldrich, *GCHQ*, p. 57; p. 192.

¹⁰ Jeffery Richelson and Desmond Ball, *The Ties that Bind: Intelligence Cooperation between the UK-USA Countries: the United Kingdom, the United States of America, Canada, Australia, and New Zealand*, (Boston, 1985), pp. 335-6.

¹¹ Ibid. See also - David Easter, 'GCHQ and British External Policy in the 1960s', *Intelligence and National Security*, 23:5 (2008), p. 685 - former GCHQ employee Jock Kane claims that GCHQ secretly gathering signals intelligence from the British embassy in South Yemen after it gained independence in 1967, stating that 'two GCHQ operators were sent to the embassy under the cover of working for the Diplomatic Wireless Service'.

¹² Easter, 'GCHQ and British External Policy in the 1960s', p. 685.

approach to their sources.¹³ The notion of the ‘dual identity’ therefore has the potential to find greater utility in future research, but also to be challenged in the context of more ambitious case studies – Asia has been but one element in demonstrating its utility to the broader field.

¹³ Moran, ‘Coming to Clarity’, p. 46.

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